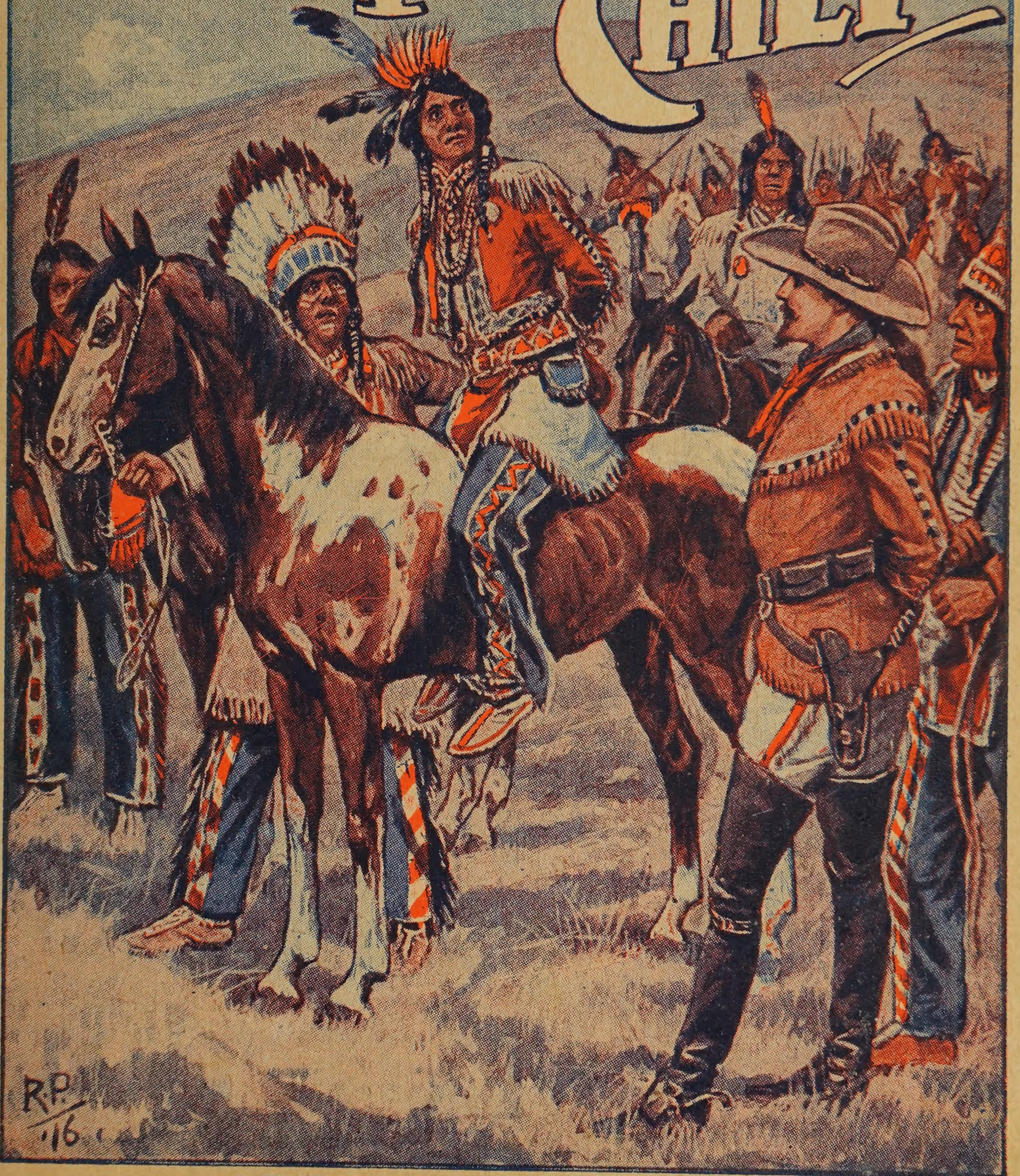


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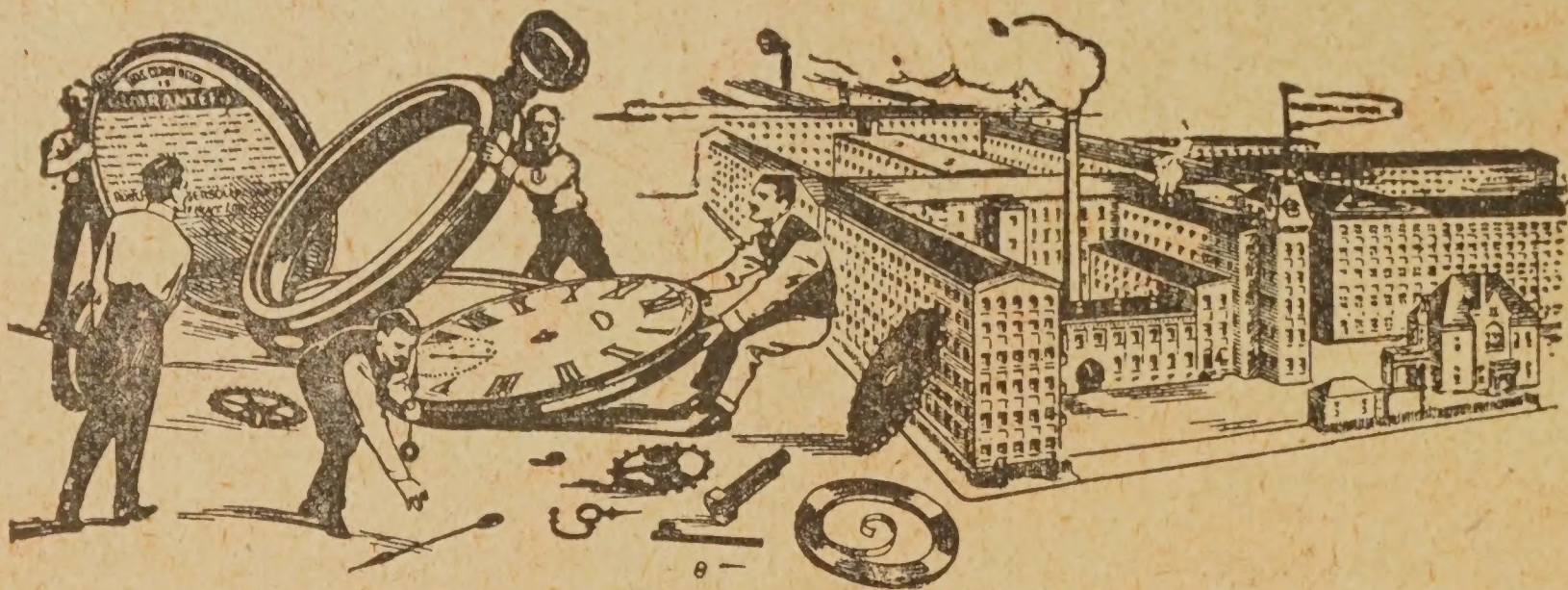
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No. 146

THE PAWNEE CHIEF



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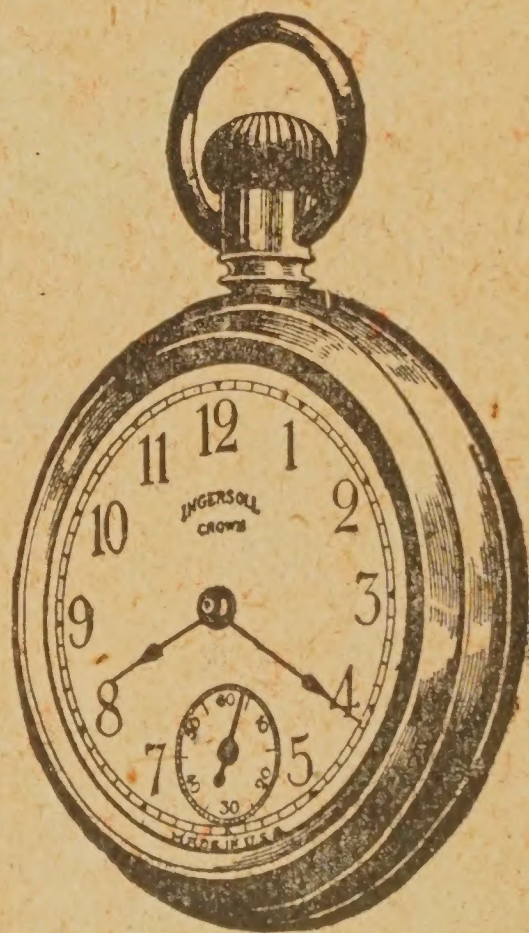
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The Pawnee Chief.

WITH BUFFALO BILL AT GOLDEN SPUR DIGGINGS.

CHAPTER I.

Captured by Blackfeet Indians.

"AH! there is the settlement at last! One more spurt, Quick Shot, my friend, and we shall be there and in time to warn the boys that the Blackfeet are out!"

Buffalo Bill panted, rather than spoke the words as he rode along beside Quick Shot, the Pawnee chief, who had been his pard in so many stirring adventures.

That both the scout and the Pawnee were almost exhausted was plain from their haggard appearance and the staggering steps of their ponies; yet the light of battle still shone in their eyes, despite the trials they had encountered during the past twenty-four hours.

Buffalo Bill and Quick Shot had been scouting up in the hills on the previous day when, learning that the Blackfeet Indians had once more taken to the warpath, they had set out at full speed for Golden Spur Settlement, where, it was plain, the redskins contemplated making their first attack. Unless the miners were warned it was pretty certain that they would be annihilated.

But misfortune lay in wait for the scout and the Pawnee. Buffalo Bill's horse had been bitten and killed by a poisonous reptile, and while the two pards

were making their way forward as best they could on the back of the Pawnee's pony, they had been spied by a band of roving Blackfeet, chased, and captured by Big Game, one of the most powerful of the Blackfeet chieftains.

Bound and helpless they were led away to the Indians' village, and would undoubtedly have suffered death at the torture stake but for the intervention of Picture Eyes, the daughter of Big Game.

Buffalo Bill had rescued Picture Eyes some time before from the Ute nation, and now the girl paid the debt she owed the scout by enabling both Buffalo Bill and Quick Shot to escape.

But they were not to get free of the village without more misfortune. The Pawnee had been badly treated by his captors, and a wound in his thigh made his progress both slow and painful.

They had not gone far when the Pawnee's strength began to flag. Their case was desperate, for at the

same moment a fierce shout from the Blackfeet told Buffalo Bill that their flight had been discovered. Picking up his companion, he staggered on.

"Let the King of the Border fly alone or he is lost!" cried Quick Shot, who caught sight of a figure lurking among the trees ahead of them.

Before Buffalo Bill

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THE PAWNEE CHIEF.

could answer the figure glided out and intercepted his progress.

It was Picture Eyes.

"Come, there is time yet!" she cried, catching Buffalo Bill by the sleeve. "The bloods will kill the great paleface! Fly—fly!"

"Will the daughter of the Blackfeet help the paleface some more?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Yes," answered the Indian maiden, in a voice distracted by anxiety. "Let the Pawnee dog die," she added.

"No; he is the friend of the paleface, and Picture Eyes must save him, too."

For one brief instant the maiden appeared to hesitate, but seeing Buffalo Bill was determined to save his companion, she turned about and bade the scout follow.

With difficulty he kept pace with her fleet movements, but the danger behind urged him to strain every nerve to keep up with her.

She led him past the wigwams into a clearing outside the village, where several Indian ponies were stake-roped.

Throwing the Pawnee on to the back of one of the wiry little animals, Buffalo Bill leaped upon another, while Picture Eyes hurriedly unfastened the ropes. She lingered for an instant at Buffalo Bill's side. The cries of the pursuing Indians rang in the air, growing momentarily louder and louder. They were racing along past the wigwams. The gleam of one of the fires shone on the girl's copper-coloured skin, and the scout noticed that she wore a look of anguish and distress.

"They will kill you if they find you have saved the paleface?" he said, quickly. "Jump up behind!"

The girl shook her head mournfully.

"The paleface is safe if he follows this trail," she whispered; "the pony will not carry Picture Eyes."

Her eyes were moist, and seizing Buffalo Bill's hand, she pressed it passionately to her lips, then giving the little mustang a fierce prod with the tip of her hunting-knife, made the

animal leap forward. Then she glided swiftly into the dark shadow, away from the cruel eyes of her people.

Quick Shot was already speeding on in advance up the trail which Big Game had taken early in the evening, when he and most of his band had left their prisoners with the squaws and set out to attack Golden Spur settlement; and Buffalo Bill urged his own pony on at a sharp canter, expecting every minute to catch the sounds of swift pursuit.

But no pursuit was made, because Picture Eyes set the Indians on a false trail, and so Buffalo Bill and the Pawnee were left to forge ahead and use every endeavour to get to Golden Spur before the Blackfeet under Big Game.

Only by making a wide detour could they hope to miss recapture by the warriors, and it was therefore with a sigh of relief that they eventually came in sight of the settlement and saw that it had not been attacked.

It was midday when, tired and travel-stained, Buffalo Bill and Quick Shot drew their ponies up before the chief shanty.

Most of the miners were busy in their various claims; but a few of the most fortunate, or the most lazy, were still taking things easy in "Gold-Dust Harbour," this being the name given to the drinking saloon which graced, or rather disgraced, the settlement.

"By thunder, if that ain't the Buffler!" ejaculated one formidable-looking rascal, as Buffalo Bill strode over the threshold.

The speaker, known as Rattler Starr, was a power in Golden Spur. Apart from being one of the most indefatigable members of the Vigilante Society, he was the most fortunate miner in the place. Between himself and Buffalo Bill a very real cause for enmity existed, but it was not to the advantage of either that this should be made manifest to the rest of the settlement. In company the two men were ostensibly the best of friends. The cause of their enmity will be disclosed as our story progresses.

A ROGUE IN DISGUISE.

Buffalo Bill looked up sharply as the ejaculation escaped his foeman's lips. A half-veiled look of hatred passed between them; but it was only momentary, and the crowd must have been keen-eyed, indeed, to detect anything in the nature of a challenge.

"You've just come in, Rattler Starr," Buffalo Bill observed.

The other gave a faint start of surprise.

"How d'ye make that out, pard?" he asked.

"Never mind how I make it out. Did you come across any Blackfeet?"

"Never a varmint. What d'ye mean, Buffler? Them reds ain't sniffing round here, I bet."

"They are not far away, and they are getting ready to make a swoop on this place. They're posted all along Mountain Trail——"

The scout's words were interrupted by a reckless, incredulous laugh.

"Seems ter me, pard, ye've got thim varmints on the brain," exclaimed Rattler Starr, hoarsely. "Me and my pards, Big Slumber and Fan Tan, hev just come in along that blithering trail, and yew kin stake yer bottom dollar, boys, there weren't no signs o' redskins, or I guess they'd hev called in our chips."

A murmur of assent rose from the careless, half-drunken group, and seeing that they were not in the humour to accept his warning, Buffalo Bill called to the saloon-keeper to prepare for him a shake-down till the evening. Half an hour later, having satisfied the cravings of the inner man, he laid himself down to partake of a well-earned rest.

CHAPTER 2.

A Rogue in Disguise.

"You scoundrel!"

"Let go, confound you!"

"You are a scoundrel, Rattler Starr!"

With the words Buffalo Bill hustled the quaking rascal through the open door and sent him sprawling amid the greasy dirt outside.

It was about a week after the events related in the previous chapter, and the Blackfeet, although they kept threateningly close to Golden Spur Settlement, had not yet made a definite attack.

A soft rain was falling, and the grey twilight was stealing up the winding valley, blotting out the tortuous river, and hovering about the mining camp of Golden Spur which dotted the left bank from the water's edge upwards. The camp-fires flickered here and there and sent red tongues of flame into the gathering darkness of the night.

For a considerable distance up the mountain-side the miners' cabins rose in tiers one above the other. Here a steep chasm, bridged by the single trunk of a fallen tree, and there a clump of dark pines, marked the outlying position of the camp.

Quick Shot, the Pawnee chief—a staunch friend of the palefaces—owned a little shanty which stood alone in the wildest and most secluded portion of the Golden Spur Diggings. It faced the rugged chasm with its rude bridge, and was completely hidden from the view of the cabins below.

A fire burned briskly by the edge of the cleft and threw a sickly glamour over the face and figure of the man who lay motionless as a log before the upright figure of Buffalo Bill.

There was something repulsive about the huddled up figure with its twisted limbs, its scowling brow, and hard mouth; its restless, deep-set eyes, and matted hair, bespattered with mud and sodden with rain.

"Mark my words, Rattler Starr," said Cody, "if by noon to-morrow you do not restore the stolen nuggets and clear Tom Tasker's character, I shall take the matter in hand and make it my business to show the real thief to the Vigilance Committee of this place. I think you know what that means."

The threat was not lost on Rattler Starr. A shiver rippled over his frame.

"I guess you're fooling, pard. I'm innocent," he muttered, sullenly.

THE PAWNEE CHIEF.

"Of poor Brisket's murder, maybe, but you are guilty of the theft. You coward! You have contrived to throw suspicion on Tom Tasker, whom you previously swindled and duped. Get up!"

"You lying fool! It's false!" thundered the accused wretch, scrambling to his feet.

The two men faced each other under vastly different emotions. Buffalo Bill was angry and alert, Rattler Starr baffled and vindictive.

"I'll let you into a secret, my friend," remarked Buffalo Bill, in a low voice. "I happen to have watched you outside Brisket's shanty, and saw you remove the gold. You had an accomplice—possibly Brisket's murderer."

"Spy!" hissed the accused, advancing a step. "If you will make me speak, you shall learn the whole truth. It was your dear friend, Tom Tasker, who murdered Brisket, and I reckon I can prove it, pard Buffler."

The accusation came like a thunderbolt, and Buffalo Bill recoiled horror-struck. Though he did not doubt Tom Tasker's innocence, he was startled at the audacity of the wretch who could charge him with such a terrible crime. Moreover, the accusation would bear weight with the already prejudiced committee, for already Tom's damaging absence from the settlement was looked upon as a proof of his guilt on the lesser charge, while there were those amongst the Vigilance Committee who hinted at his connection with the graver crime.

"I guess that ain't the kind o' notion yew was driving at, pard," chuckled the ruffian. "It were true I had a 'complice and he were Tom Tasker. It ain't likely I were going ter give him away 'cos awkward question would be asked. We patched up a plan 'tween him and me; and ef yer wants ter know where that durned little saint are hiding, yer'll find him inside yonder strip o' pines."

"It's a lie."

"I kin prove it."

"I'd like to know how."

"Quick Shot, the Pawnee brave, saw the blow struck. Yes, pard Buffler, the redskin saw Tom Tasker knife Brisket. Ask him."

Buffalo Bill started. Certainly Quick Shot's manner had been strange of late. He seemed to avoid the subject of the crime whenever Tom's name was mentioned. Perhaps the rascal's statement bore some modicum of truth. Yet to the scout this alternative seemed impossible.

"Quick Shot would be the last to hide so black a crime," he observed.

"The great Wonder Worker of the West speaks too soon," broke in the Pawnee chief, himself suddenly pushing through the saplings which grew in abundance round the cabin.

"How did my Pawnee brother come here?" exclaimed Buffalo Bill.

"The paleface spoke too loud. Quick Shot came to warn his great brother that the white man's camp will overhear the angry words which pass between himself and the bad paleface," said Quick Shot, eyeing the two men quietly.

"The Pawnee chief would go," he added, presently, "but the great paleface must know that his bad brother yonder speaks truly. The redskin has no liking for him, and he's the thief, but the young paleface miner killed the gold-seeker."

"Quick Shot, is that correct?" Buffalo Bill cried, with a painful catch in his voice.

"As sure as the Pawnee brave hopes to reach the happy hunting-grounds of his nation, it is true. It makes the red man's heart bleed to speak it, and he would give his tongue to the Blackfeet before he would tell what he saw to any other paleface in Golden Spur," responded the Indian, sadly.

"Tom cannot be guilty," exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "My redskin brother does not understand."

"But the white men in camp would understand," replied Quick Shot, hurriedly. "The paleface and the dead miner were bad enemies."

Quite unconsciously the Pawnee made Buffalo Bill wince. It was only

too true that Brisket and Tom Tasker had been at enmity for some time.

"There is some horrible mistake here," said Buffalo Bill, decisively. "Tom is innocent, I am sure of it."

"I guess he's waiting for a chance to get away, pard Buffler. There ain't much innercence about that," interposed Rattler Starr.

Secretly he feared that Buffalo Bill's earnestness might convince Quick Shot against his reason. The redskin turned about like a flash.

"How does the paleface know he is waiting to get away?" he demanded.

"Because, redskin, the paleface helped him to escape from the Vigilantes. He is hiding in yonder thicket."

Quick Shot gave an expressive grunt, but seemed undecided what to do or say. Then, after a pause, he turned to Buffalo Bill.

"Will the great chief of the palefaces help his redskin brother get the young paleface away?" he asked. "Quick Shot loves him, and will save his life if he can."

The Indian made a sign to Buffalo Bill, who responded in the same way. Without another word the three men moved towards the chasm where the pine-thicket extended up the mountain-side.

"Get him across and destroy the bridge," said Rattler Starr, hurriedly.

His eagerness surprised Buffalo Bill, who, turning to Quick Shot, bade him replenish the fire.

The Indian advanced towards the pine-ridge at a run. He had not gone far when he encountered a pair of staring, terror-stricken eyes. He knew them well. They belonged to Tom Tasker, once the favourite of the camp.

"Let my paleface brother trust Quick Shot, who will be his friend," he cried.

"Quick, out of my path!" retorted the fugitive, whose whole attention seemed preoccupied. "Out of my way—sharp!" he repeated.

The words were spoken in a tone of authority, and what followed so startled the Pawnee chief that he

could only throw himself face forward upon the ground as Tom levelled his rifle and fired point-blank.

In another instant the fugitive sprang from his hiding-place and sped towards the bridge.

Something had transpired which Quick Shot had not perceived.

Well might Tom's eyes have expressed horror when the Pawnee chief addressed him, for he had witnessed the committal of a ghastly deed the moment the latter turned his back on the chasm. He had seen Buffalo Bill bending over the gnarled trunk which formed the bridge across the chasm, when, swift as a stroke of lightning, Rattler Starr had whipped his revolver out, and, pressing it to the scout's ear, had fired.

Tom's shot, aimed at the murderer, was almost simultaneous, but the aim was faulty, and so Rattler Starr was left unharmed, whilst his victim went plunging over the steep sides of the chasm and rolled below, limp and seemingly lifeless.

Desperate at the sight, the fugitive sprang at the guilty wretch, and a terrible struggle ensued.

The shots had alarmed the miners in camp, and in a few minutes men came running up the sides breathless and horrified. One or two of them had seen the body plunge down, while all watched the two figures locked together in a deadly embrace above.

"Help! help! you cowards!—help!" roared Rattler Starr. "He's killed the Buffler, and he'll kill me if yer ain't lively."

Headed by the Vigilantes, the miners made a rush, and in a minute the youth and his accuser were surrounded and forcibly torn apart.

"I guess, pards, this is a lynching job!" gasped Rattler Starr, struggling hard for breath. "Tom Tasker, that's him; he's murdered the Buffler, and he'd have murdered me and no blarmed error."

"What d'ye say, boys?" demanded one of the crowd.

"Lynch him!" came the ominous response.

Bleeding and stunned, falsely

THE PAWNEE CHIEF.

accused, and quite helpless, Tom Tasker was seized and led away.

* * * * *

A driving mist hid the early dawn when Quick Shot crept cautiously out of his cabin, and, with uncertain steps, wended his way towards the camp.

The place where Tom had been imprisoned was situated at the extreme southern limit of the settlement, where the river-bank widened and extended in a long, flat ledge alongside the thick growth of timber which covered the bank and rose three-parts up the mountain-side.

This forest had been partly cleared away within the precincts of the camp, and for some distance past Tom's prison. The latter consisted of the upper part of that oddly-named saloon—"Gold-Dust Harbour."

Where in the ordinary course of things a piece of bunting would have fluttered only a black smudge peeped moodily through the grey mist. It was an ominous black flag, unfurled whenever some condemned wretch was about to undergo the death penalty.

Quick Shot quickly espied it, and his face clouded.

A circumstance had happened during the night to convince him of Tom's innocence. By rare good chance he had wandered into the forest, and there found Long Joe, the camp bully, dying. The latter confessed that, aided by Rattler Starr, he had slain Brisket, the miner, and in turn was dying by his partner's hand.

To this confession Quick Shot had listened in silent horror. Then, as well as he could, Long Joe wrote down and signed a statement a few minutes before he died.

Silently the Indian had covered over the corpse and returned to his cabin, there to pass the rest of the night racking his brain for some plan to save Tom Tasker. He had given up all hope of being able to recover the corpse of his friend, Buffalo Bill. He did not expect to find the scout's remains when daylight appeared, for the stream would by that time have carried them far down the gorge.

Quick Shot finally decided to confront Rattler Starr with his villainy, but though he could prove Tom's innocence, he feared the proof was hardly strong enough to convince the Vigilantes.

To make sure of Tom's escape the Pawnee chief made up his mind to attempt his rescue. On this errand he was bent when he crept stealthily away from his cabin.

As he stood well in the shadow of a clump of pines and scanned the "Gold-Dust Harbour" saloon his quick ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps in the rear. In a moment he was on the alert, and, getting under cover, he peered cautiously through the foliage, and perceived about a dozen miners in the wake of Rattler Starr and a couple of well-known rascals named Big Slumper and Fan Tan.

Gliding forward, the redskin intercepted the miners' advance. They viewed him suspiciously. One or two shouldered their rifles, but quick as thought Quick Shot covered Rattler Starr with his Winchester repeater.

"Say out, redskin," growled Big Slumper, perhaps the biggest ruffian in the camp. "No fooling with that toy. Drop it, or by thunder we'll lynch such varmints as yew!"

Quick Shot stood his ground; his finger was on the trigger, when Rattler Starr whispered something to Big Slumper, who in turn addressed his companion, Fan Tan. Meanwhile the crowd had rapidly increased in numbers.

"Hands up, redskin!" roared a dozen voices.

Quick Shot saw that he was covered by fully a score of weapons, and likely to be riddled with bullets, but he remained stubborn. Hurriedly he related the story of the miner Brisket's murder as he had heard it from the lips of Long Joe.

Immediately all eyes were turned on Rattler Starr, who seemed utterly indifferent to the serious charge.

He said something in an undertone to one of his boon companions, who turned again on Quick Shot.

RATTLER STARR ENCOUNTERS AN APPARITION.

"Hands up, redskin, or the boys o' Golden Spur 'll shoot!" he thundered.

Simultaneously the ominous click of many triggers warned the Pawnee that the miners really meant to carry Big Slumper's threat into execution. Alive he might still be of some use to Tom, dead he would be none. The argument appealed to him, and dropping his weapon, he slowly and reluctantly raised his arms above his head.

He was immediately surrounded.

"Look lively, boys! We'll make the varmint smart fer this bit o' fool's play!" yelled Big Slumper.

"Pards, it ain't my nature ter want ter call in anyone's chips," drawled Rattler Starr, speaking for the first time. "This redskin, I ain't harmed him, but he's a durned cute varmint ter play hokery-pokery now. Yer'd look queer p'r'aps ef some of his sneaking braves carried off Tom Tasker while we're pow-wow'ing here. I guess it's a plan, pards, ter rescue our man. And I asks yer one and all ter send him up the flume."

The crafty rascal knew the fierce outburst was bound to come.

"String the varmint up along with Tom Tasker!" cried the miners.

Quick Shot began to struggle violently, but the more he struggled the more vicious his captors became. He was quite powerless to resist their ever-increasing numbers, and at last he wisely ceased his efforts. Throwing him to the ground, they quickly secured his hands and feet.

Meanwhile Tom had been carried from his place of captivity and deposited beside the luckless redskin, having his limbs secured in like manner. Rattler Starr affixed the slip-noose round his neck, while Big Slumper performed the same office for Quick Shot, the ends of the ropes being flung over the stout limb of a black oak. Then all being ready, the miners moved some distance away, preparatory to raining a shower of bullets on their suspended victims.

At a signal from Rattler Starr, half a dozen men sprang forward and as-

sisted Big Slumper and Fan Tan to raise the bodies into the air.

The ropes tightened round the throats of the victims; each noose pressed into the quivering flesh. A thousand sledge-hammers din'ed in their ears, broken at last by a short, sharp roar. Simultaneously both crashed to the ground, and the last glimmer of consciousness was rudely snatched away.

The ropes which had been secured to the trunk of the tree had been shot through, and the two victims had fallen, mangled and dying, into the undergrowth of the forest. Not a few of the better-class miners turned away, sick at heart. The rest slowly departed, but Rattler Starr seemed inclined to linger behind. He was joined by Big Slumper and Fan Tan.

"I guess that there war a close pull, pard. The redskin nearly spoiled the game," observed Big Slumper.

"What d'ye mean?"

"I calculate the redskin knew more than the boys of Golden Spur when he swore it war you, pard, what called in the Buffler's chips," he said, with a grin.

The eyes of the two men met. There was something in Rattler Starr's look which caused Big Slumper to turn away shuddering.

"It ain't likely, pard, that me and you is going ter fall foul o' each other, but s'posing we do, who's going to take yer words against mine?" growled Starr.

The question was not easy to answer, and neither Big Slumper nor Fan Tan attempted to solve the riddle it contained.

CHAPTER 3.

Rattler Starr Encounters an Apparition.

THE sun came out and the mist vanished, and nothing was left to mark the scene of the late tragedy. Nothing seemed to ruffle the early beauty of the morning; yet the sunbeams, dancing into the depth of the pine forest, fell aslant the lithe figure of

THE PAWNEE CHIEF.

a redskin maiden—a lonely, silent figure.

Once the girl paused at the sound of Rattler Starr's voice, then, advancing with incredible speed, it swerved neither to left nor right, but glided noiselessly through the undergrowth towards the spot where the victims of the miners had fallen.

The glittering eyes of the maiden seemed to pierce the deepest shadow and see beyond. Presently she pushed her way through a dense thicket and glided into the presence of the two victims.

Without a moment's hesitation she tore the noose from Tom's neck and began to work his arms convulsively up and down, afterwards treating Quick Shot in like manner. She loosened the latter's jacket and placed her ear above his heart, and finding that it beat faintly, she turned her attention once more to Tom.

The Pawnee chief gave a faint gasp, and some minutes later he was sitting up conscious of his surroundings. The terrible ordeal through which he had so lately gone seemed now nothing more than a bad dream.

His astonishment, when his eyes alighted on his rescuer, was impossible to describe.

He uttered a faint exclamation, but the Indian maiden instantly clapped her hands over his mouth and pointed significantly to the open where the miners had disappeared.

"Quick Shot is proud to be the brother of Valley Flower," he muttered, fervently, gazing in unspeakable admiration on the girl, who was indeed of the Pawnee tribe, and related to him by the ties of kindred.

All at once a low cry from behind made both the chief and the maiden glance quickly round. They saw that Tom Tasker had opened his eyes, which ~~were~~ riveted upon some object gliding through the undergrowth.

The girl started, for she saw that the object which had transfixed the unfortunate young man was an ugly but, luckily, not a venomous reptile.

She took a couple of swift, silent

strides, and by a deft movement hurled the reptile over the bushes into the open.

Then without a word she assisted Tom to rise, and led him into the dense forest, leaving Quick Shot to follow as best he could.

And it seemed a miracle that either of the men could move at all, but, luckily for them, the first volley from the miners had only wounded them slightly, while the ropes were cut through before a second fusillade could reach them.

Slowly the Indian maiden led her paleface companion further and further into the depth of the pine forest. She was often forced to pause, and now and again she exchanged a few words with him. At first he did not understand, but something of the truth occurred to him as he moved along supported by the brave and graceful girl.

Thus the distance between Quick Shot and his sister gradually widened. The redskin laboured on wearily, his limbs dragging heavily, his head in a whirl, his copper-coloured face stained with blood, and his clothes draggled and torn.

Suddenly he paused and wiped the mist from his eyes. He had approached the open by mistake, and there confronting him stood the figure of his enemy.

A yell of terror greeted his appearance, and Rattler Starr leaped a few paces back, shaking and trembling in every limb.

The ruffian's fright awoke Quick Shot to a sense of his own danger. He was quite unable to cope with his enemy, who no doubt supposed that it was the apparition of one of his victims which he beheld. Quick as thought the redskin dived back into the undergrowth and disappeared.

When Rattler Starr again ventured to glance in that direction, he found that what he took to be the spectre of his late victim had vanished. The possibility of the redskin having survived the late terrible ordeal never occurred to him.

RATTLER STARR ENCOUNTERS AN APPARITION.

Unnerved by this manifestation of his victim in broad daylight, the rogue decided there and then to quit the neighbourhood. Without further delay he returned to the settlement, gave out that he was going prospecting up the valley, and promptly turned his back on Golden Spur.

Meanwhile, the Indian maiden on her errand of mercy came at last upon a lonely wigwam, where, after making Tom comfortable, she began to retrace her steps until she struck Quick Shot's trail and finally came up with him.

The day was more than half-spent when the two victims of Rattler Starr met in Valley Flower's wigwam. Owing in great measure to the decoction of herbs which Valley Flower had compelled Tom to drink, he had recovered from the worst effects of his adventure of the morning.

"How did it happen that our enemies failed to mark us with their bullets?" he asked of Quick Shot.

The redskin shook his head.

"The bad palefaces fire, but Valley Flower fire first and cut the ropes, then the bullets of the bad palefaces do no harm," explained the maiden, half-shyly.

"You mean that you saved our lives," exclaimed Tom.

"Valley Flower scented danger many days ago," was the answer. "She tried to warn her brother Quick Shot last night, but his cabin was empty, and so she stole into the pine forest, hoping to save Quick Shot's paleface friend."

Tom struggled up and seized the Indian girl's hand. She made a pretty picture in the subdued light of the wigwam.

"Valley Flower has heaped a debt on the shoulders of the paleface which he can never repay," he faltered.

But before he could say more the girl's skilled ears detected a distant sound. By a swift gesture of her hand she enjoined silence, and swept noiselessly out of the wigwam.

Several minutes passed before her companions caught the sound of her return.

"Let Quick Shot follow his sister," she whispered. "The bad paleface is climbing the mountain trail."

In an instant the Pawnee was on the alert, and passed out after the girl, followed rapidly by Tom.

It was painful work for the two men to follow in the wake of their silent and indefatigable young guide. They stealthily advanced through a dense cluster of pines, which suddenly broke away and left a steep, perpendicular drop of nearly a couple of hundred feet to the winding track below.

By peering through the bush-covered edge, they could see without being seen themselves.

Sure enough, Rattler Starr was climbing the rugged path below. He paused almost beneath the crouching trio, then, spurring on his pony, he went heedlessly up the rugged path, looking very haggard and grey.

Quick Shot moved close to the prone figure of Valley Flower, but the latter never stirred. Tom, who was growing anxious, looked alarmed. His fears had seized the Pawnee chief.

"Does Valley Flower still see the bad paleface?" he whispered.

The maiden did not move or speak.

Thoroughly roused, the chief gripped her by the wrist; then a low cry of dismay broke from his lips. Instantly Tom was by his side.

The young man seemed to forget his own aches in the presence of the inexplicable tragedy which appeared to have been here enacted. His companion's look was one of unspeakable horror.

Quick Shot turned the young figure over, and exposed the maiden's features. These were fearfully distorted, while the eyes had taken on the glassy look of death.

"What does it mean? She is not dead, surely?" gasped Tom.

Quick Shot remained silent, staring down blankly at the distorted features of his sister. Tom was the first to recover his presence of mind.

"She is not dead!" he cried; "her pulse beats."

The Pawnee chief, dropping on to

his knees, began to chafe the girl's hands, while Tom loosened the robe about her throat. Gradually her distorted features relaxed into their normal lines, and a half-smothered sigh escaped the maiden.

Some time elapsed, however, before she was able to move. And then when questioned eagerly by Quick Shot, as well as Tom, she shook her head and refused to offer any explanation.

To Quick Shot it was clear that she had suffered a grievous shock, but what had occasioned it he was at a loss to comprehend.

CHAPTER 4.

Buffalo Bill's Miraculous Escape.

WHEN Rattler Starr made his sudden attack on Buffalo Bill's life, the latter, taken at a disadvantage, and wholly unprepared for the assault, dropped back into the horrible chasm and plunged headlong into its dark, gloomy depths.

A watchful Providence saved him from instant death, for just as he expected to be dashed lifeless to the bottom of the rock-strewn river he was conscious of a slight shock, followed instantly by a second and more severe one. He had been brought up by some obstacle.

What it was he could not at the time decide, for complete darkness encompassed him, and his first thought was to save himself from a further fall.

He felt the obstacle beneath sway dangerously under his weight; then, all at once, he began to drop once more, though quite gently in comparison with the first terrible plunge.

It was then that he understood what had happened. His fall had been broken by a bed of needle pines spread over a tracery of creeper work which was now giving way beneath his weight.

He could hear the torrent gurgling along the bottom.

Suddenly the noise grew deafening, and a moment later he plunged be-

neath the restless surface. The cold douche did more to help him recover his scattered senses than anything else. When, after two or three seconds' interval, he regained the surface of the river it was to steer a course as well as he knew how for the middle.

The current grew stronger further up the gorge, and for some time he was carried along, unable to discover any likely landing-place.

At last he contrived to clamber on to one of the rocky slopes which rose from the waterside where the gorge deepened. Here he remained till day broke.

A careful survey showed him that he was in that portion of the gorge where it cut clean into the great mountain chain. Frowning, precipitous sides looked down on him. To scale them there would be a hopeless task.

Again he took to the water, and carefully worked his passage between the great boulders, and presently came to an abrupt turn where a tributary poured its waters into the main stream. His keen eyes detected at once a possible exit.

Clambering on to the sloping side, he slowly and laboriously picked his way up the receding barrier till, near the summit, he came upon a sudden break in the side, and the rest was comparatively easy.

Once on the top of the gorge, his first thought was to look about for something edible, but the only fare that presented itself were a few coarse roots. They were of a kind which the Indians greatly favoured when game was unobtainable. In his search for them he gradually moved away from his place of escape. But this he did not notice till surprised by a drifting curtain of mist.

In an instant he realised the full extent of the danger, and cast a hurried glance round in order to obtain some idea of his bearings.

To the left the virgin forest extended as far as the eye could reach. To the right the moving curtain of mist had completely obliterated every

BUFFALO BILL'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE.

landmark. It was the same behind, and in a very few moments would be the same in front.

Leaping to his feet, Buffalo Bill took the only course open to him. He made as rapidly as possible towards the forest, but ere he had reached even the undergrowth, which would herald his approach to its limits, he was enveloped in the fog.

Still he kept moving, fearful lest a pause should upset his calculations. He knew too well the danger attending these treacherous mists. The most experienced frontiersman, and even the cunning redskins, practised as they were in all the arts of woodcraft, were hopelessly at sea in times like the present.

He was getting anxious, for though he had been walking rapidly for quite ten minutes, the ground gave no indications of the forest.

Suddenly he stumbled and went down feet foremost. He grasped a tuft of grass, but the root gave, and he continued to drop twelve or fifteen feet over the edge of a ravine.

The mist rolled densely overhead, but it was thinner here, and enabled him to catch a glimpse of his surroundings.

He struck on his feet, then, plunging forward, was brought up on a ledge or shelf about four feet wide by ten or twelve long. This ledge overhung a depth so black and dismal that he dared not think how far down it was to the tiny stream rippling over the knife-like rocks at the bottom.

The ravine was something like fifteen feet wide, and as Buffalo Bill made this discovery he saw directly opposite to him in a mass of rocks a dark opening, which he knew at the first glance to be the lair of some wild animal.

Something like despair filled his heart when he glanced overhead, for he saw that the edge of the cliff projected forward, rendering any attempt to scale it impossible.

To leap the ravine was out of the question, since the ledge upon the other side was slightly above the level of the one supporting him.

Fortunately he had broken no bones, though both hands were badly cut, and he was becoming horribly drowsy. It flashed upon him that he must have eaten one of the roots which the redskins utilised for producing sleep. He struggled desperately against the desire for sleep, but gradually it overpowered him; his struggles grew more and more feeble, and presently he sank into a heavy slumber.

* * * *

Buffalo Bill awoke with a start to find daylight had given place to night.

The moon was up, and her beams struck the opposite side of the chasm, disclosing the ledge, and something more.

A huge panther was just emerging from his den, and its movements had sent some loose stones rattling to the bottom of the ravine.

The noise had awakened the sleeping scout.

Though just roused, Buffalo Bill was fully alert. He watched the brute closely. The animal, while sniffing the air, seemed to be looking at him. The creature's whole bearing showed that it had scented its human foe.

Every moment Buffalo Bill expected the animal would take the leap across the ravine. Very cautiously his hand stole up to his belt and his fingers gripped the barrel of one of his revolvers; but as the minutes sped by and the animal still hesitated, the scout began to speculate on its purpose.

Presently the panther turned to the left and trotted along over the ground a distance of twenty feet. Then he wheeled and passed the den by about the same distance the other way. When he had gone over the beat two or three times, Buffalo Bill discovered what was the matter.

As the huge brute came towards him again, he got a clear view, and saw in the bright moonlight that the animal was stone blind.

He was speculating on getting an easy shot, when of a sudden there was an alarm. More stones rattled

down, and the beast started round, pausing directly in front of Buffalo Bill. He was so near that the scout could catch his every movement. If the film could be torn from those eyes, how they would glint, and glitter, and blaze!

There was something in the sound of the brute's low growling which chilled the listener's blood—a menace, a warning of what was to come.

Buffalo Bill fingered his revolver uneasily; he half feared that the weapon had become fouled during its contact with the water.

The panther again got scent of the scout; he was becoming terribly restless, but still seemed to hesitate. Something delayed his spring. He waited so long that Buffalo Bill concluded that his blindness reasoned against his ferocity. He seemed finally, however, to make up his mind to attempt the leap.

He gave a few low growls, and laid his ears flat back on his head, while his claws clinched on the flinty rock as he sought a foothold for a spring.

He ~~was~~ on the very point of taking the leap when the capricious breeze played him a trick. He suddenly lost the scent and walked down the ledge to pick it up again. Ten feet to the right he got it, and with a fierce snarl he crouched and made his leap.

A couple of shots sped from Buffalo Bill's revolver, but the beast was too quick, and the scout momentarily lost sight of him in the darkness. It was a clear leap of fifteen feet, and only on that spot could he strike the opposite shelf. He rose in the air like a bird taking flight, and describing a graceful half curve, landed so lightly that the watchful scout felt rather than heard him.

The brute was some distance away when Buffalo Bill again fired, and this time the shot struck him just behind the right shoulder. With a roar that echoed through the ravine, the beast sprang at his assailant.

Buffalo Bill dropped flat, and the animal leaped over him, and went crashing against the side of the rock.

Uttering another roar, the wounded brute leaped back across the ravine, and disappeared into his den.

With a half-suppressed ejaculation Buffalo Bill drew himself back until he rested against the cliff.

His attention had been attracted by an ominous growl coming from the head of the ravine some little distance away. He saw something slinking along in the shadow of the rocks, and presently a full-grown female panther, followed by a good-sized cub, scrambled down the rocky side towards the den of the blind beast.

Some taint of the scout's presence must have been in the air, even though so faint that the brutes could not locate him at once. An angry snarl broke from the female, and in a moment the blind panther reappeared. He must have lost a considerable amount of blood, for his movements were slow and faltering.

The other brute all at once sighted Buffalo Bill, and giving a roar far more terrible than any which her mate had given utterance to, she took the leap across the chasm.

Halfway across she encountered a well-directed shot from the scout's revolver, and the bullet, entering the panther's eye, pierced her brain. She seemed to stop dead in the midst of her leap, and then with a backward turn crashed into the ravine and vanished into the darkness, to be crushed to a pulp on the rocks below.

Almost simultaneously Buffalo Bill was startled by a shot coming from above.

Glancing up, he saw the head and shoulders of a redskin peering over the edge of the cliff. A cry of thanksgiving escaped him, for he recognised in the new-comer his old ally, Quick Shot.

The Pawnee eyed his paleface leader for some moments in wonder. Then he gave vent to an expressive war-whoop and disappeared.

He was absent some time, but when he reappeared it was in company with Tom and Valley Flower, and with a long coil of plaited hide, which he

BUFFALO BILL'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE.

proceeded to pay out carefully to the endangered scout below.

Once Buffalo Bill had secured the end, to mount was comparatively easy. The rest had refreshed him, and with little difficulty he climbed up by planting his feet against the face of the cliff, and swarming hand over hand up the line, which had been fastened above to the tough roots of a sapling.

Meanwhile Quick Shot had fired at and killed both the cub and the already wounded panther. He was the first to greet Buffalo Bill and assist him over the ledge.

Tom and Valley Flower were both overjoyed to meet the scout once more. They listened in silent wonder whilst he hurriedly related the hair-breadth escapes which had befallen him.

But when in turn he began to question them as to the events which had led up to their opportune arrival there, Quick Shot, with a sweep of his arm, drew Buffalo Bill's attention to a distant wigwam which a ray of moonlight disclosed beneath the trees.

"Let the Wonder Worker of the West seek rest and shelter first," he said. "Behold the lodge of Quick Shot's sister, Valley Flower, is near at hand."

Buffalo Bill was too familiar with the ways of his staunch ally not to see that the Pawnee had important news to communicate. He turned with a smile to the Indian maiden, who, while much younger than her brother, had more than once proved to Buffalo Bill a faithful friend.

He was not surprised to learn that she had occupied the wigwam alone for some time past. Like all of her tribe she was a clever trapper, and made a daring scout. Against her hereditary foes, the Blackfeet, she entertained a bitter hatred, intensified because some time ago she had narrowly escaped the servitude of a slave in one of the wigwams of the chief Scar Face.

As Buffalo Bill turned to her, she

made a sign that she wished to speak with him alone. Keen-eyed as the Pawnee chief was, this action of the maiden escaped him, while Tom, altogether ignorant of the Indian signs, could have attached no importance to it had he observed it, which he did not.

A few minutes later the little party was securely lodged inside the small wigwam, where a bright fire and a good meal administered to their creature comforts.

"My Indian brother looks tired," remarked Buffalo Bill, hoping to turn the conversation into the desired channel.

"He has not slept since he missed the paleface chief," came the deliberate answer.

Buffalo Bill looked questioningly from one to the other, surprised that neither seemed inclined to fill up the pause.

"Come, Tom, I am neither a spy nor a stranger," he said, at last. "Tell me how you got away from Golden Spur."

"Literally by the skin of my teeth," Tom replied. "Ask Quick Shot."

Thus directly appealed to, the Pawnee began to unfold, in the picturesque language of his tribe, the startling incidents which had befallen himself and Tom Tasker, and related how, in the very nick of time, their lives had been saved by Glancing Eyes.

"She has consented to become my wife," Tom explained, warmly.

He had long admired the beautiful Indian maiden, but that feeling had now deepened into a passionate longing to call her his very own.

Glancing Eyes's happiness was complete. She looked half-bashfully at the smiling scout, who at that moment had received from the Pawnee chief Long Joe's dying confession.

The writing was not particularly good, but it was sufficiently plain to permit of the statement being read.

Having suitably congratulated the maiden and her grateful lover, Buf-

falo Bill turned his attention to the camp bully's dying confession. He perused it over twice without offering any comment; then he placed it inside a small waterproof pocket attached to his belt.

"The warrior of a hundred fights has done well," he said, fixing his gaze on his Pawnee ally; "he has earned the paleface's lasting gratitude. He has risked his life to save an innocent man, and is now a fugitive from Golden Spur Diggings. Let him ask his reward; it shall be a handsome one."

The eyes of all were fastened on Quick Shot, who, as Buffalo Bill finished, scrambled to his feet and strode over to where the scout was sitting.

"The words of the great Wonder Worker are like music to his brother's ears," he said, in a voice choking with emotion. "Quick Shot would ask no better reward than to be always at the great white chief's side. The Pawnee has spoken. Is it well?"

A solemn pause followed his words. Then, getting up, Buffalo Bill took the redskin's hand, and, holding it above the fire, in native fashion took the fraternal oath. The Pawnee's eyes glistened with pleasure.

"Quick Shot has spoken well," Buffalo Bill said; "he has been a true friend to the paleface; his desire is granted."

"Now is the heart of the Pawnee lightened," exclaimed the redskin, "and no longer will he pine for the days when his fathers scalped the Blackfeet. The paleface's enemies are his enemies; he will learn the white man's ways; and at last, when his time comes, he will go forth into their happy hunting-grounds, where his sister and her paleface chief will follow."

At the mention of the Blackfeet, Buffalo Bill's face slightly clouded. It recalled more vividly to him the danger attending their presence in the neighbourhood, and the fact that his warning had been unheeded by the miners of Golden Spur.

The terrible experiences which he and Quick Shot had gone through

with the Blackfeet a short time previously were still fresh in his mind.

He turned hurriedly to Tom Tasker. "It will not be easy to get away from here," he said. "The Blackfeet have already raided many parts of the district. That scoundrel Rattler Starr——"

He got no further, for a sharp cry broke from Glancing Eyes. She was trembling from head to foot, and evincing every sign of terror.

Tom sprang to her assistance, and Quick Shot turned hurriedly to the scout, acquainting him for the first time with her mysterious seizure earlier in the day.

Buffalo Bill listened curiously to the story of Rattler Starr's departure from the diggings, but he offered no comment, for, as the redskin was finishing, he saw the girl's eyes were fixed upon himself, and she repeated the secret sign of warning.

CHAPTER 5.

Rattler Starr's Treachery Exposed.

THE little party inside the lonely wigwam were early astir when the next dawn broke. At least one of their number had passed the night in anxious thought. He had obtained a clue—the very clue he wanted—from the one he had thought would be the very last person to supply it.

We will go back a few hours and explain how this occurred.

Immediately Valley Flower had ascertained that Tom and Quick Shot had dropped off to sleep, she had stolen quietly to Buffalo Bill's side and held a long and whispered conversation.

Every word spoken was in an undertone, too low to reach the others, even had they been awake and inclined to listen.

A look of eager surprise passed over Buffalo Bill's face as the Indian maiden proceeded. Having heard her out, he made her repeat the startling story over again. Then he had pondered over it through the long,

RATTLER STARR'S TREACHERY EXPOSED.

weary hours which preceded the dawn.

His mind was made up, and taking Valley Flower aside, he enjoined her to say not a word to either Tom or Quick Shot.

The Indian maiden, who fully understood the importance of the news which she had disclosed to the scout, promised that neither by word nor manner would she betray her secret to the others. And Buffalo Bill knew that he could rely upon her.

He hastened to suggest to Quick Shot that a move ought to be made.

The plan finally decided upon was this: Quick Shot, Tom, and Valley Flower were to follow the track through the mountains and make for the Crow country, where it would be easy to get together a band of Crow Indians to lead against the marauding Blackfeet.

Meanwhile, Buffalo Bill would scout round the glen and ascertain what he could about the movements of the Blackfeet, rejoining his party at a spot on the Missouri River, called Silver Gulch.

Thus a couple of hours after dawn he had mounted one of his ally's ponies and ridden forth alone.

Just before midday the pony began to evince signs of distress, and Buffalo Bill wisely halted. Corralling the pony, he threw himself down in the shade of some wild peach-trees, and there relieved the pangs of hunger by a meal of wild berries and fruit. It was not until the fierce heat of the afternoon sun had abated that he moved forward again.

The country was very wild and very desolate, but, judging by the general trend of the stream, Buffalo Bill concluded that he was moving rapidly towards the glen occupied by the Blackfeet. He was desirous of reaching the neighbourhood of a certain miner's shanty in order to make his bearings for Silver Gulch.

The utmost caution was necessary to ensure the success of his plan.

Keeping well to the eastern bank of the stream, but no longer attempting to ford it, he moved forward

under cover of the approaching darkness.

It was an hour after sundown when he crossed the stream and ascended the steep slope of the opposite bank. The dense timber afforded him ample cover.

At last he reached a narrow forest track, and, picketing the pony here, he crept along towards a cascade whose boisterous rush became distinctly audible as he moved forward. The track began to slope down the steep bank, but as yet the waterfall was not visible.

Buffalo Bill rightly guessed that he was traversing one of the miner's emergency trails. Probably its beginning further down would be hidden from the opposite bank. Nor was he mistaken.

Suddenly his progress was stayed by what seemed in the darkness to be an extensive boulder. He stumbled heavily against the obstruction, which gave forth a hollow ring, and the sound instantly arrested his attention. Presently he found that the obstacle was nothing more formidable than a cunningly-contrived door which moved on a pivot by pressure at the top.

Slipping past and feeling his way cautiously along, he found himself in a low, subterranean passage which sloped with many abrupt curves and twists.

As he proceeded the rush of the waterfall increased in volume and sound till its heavy roar effectually smothered any sounds made in his own advance.

An abrupt turn of the passage brought him directly beneath the cascade, which splashed and tumbled into the glen below. Here and there where the thick curtain of waters parted he caught a glimpse of fires.

He was not certain, but he fancied he could make out moving figures. The uncertainty egged him on. His foothold beneath the waterfall consisted of split pine-trunks arranged lengthwise.

Crossing swiftly, he entered a second underground passage, which, in contrast to the first, sloped gently

upwards. It was, moreover, devoid of all turns, and soon brought the daring explorer to a termination.

He did not reach the end. That was impossible, owing to a suffocating volume of smoke which forced him to beat a hasty retreat. In moving backwards he discovered that a portion of the passage branched off to the left.

Stepping forward with extreme caution he entered what must have been a small, square, subterranean chamber. It was not only quite dry, but free from the musty, rank smell which pervaded both portions of the passage outside. Moreover, the ground had been boarded over and quantities of stores had been deposited there. At one end a rude flight of steps, formed by empty kegs and heavy cases, led up to the roof.

Buffalo Bill climbed thither, feeling absolutely certain that he would find a trap-door somewhere above. Nor did he err, for his quick fingers discovered a bolt which slipped easily back under the slightest pressure.

Pushing gently upwards, he had the satisfaction of moving the trap a few inches above the ground.

A stream of cold air rushed through the aperture, and many voices were instantly audible.

He tried to get a glimpse of his surroundings, but a dark barrier extended all round his line of vision. Above the barrier, however, was visible the red glow of fire which lit up the tall pines and disclosed the moving bonnets of one or two Indians.

He listened breathlessly for some minutes, and though he managed to distinguish a few words that were spoken, it was quite impossible from his position to make out the gist of what was said. His anxiety to learn more was excited by the fact that speech was being exchanged in the English tongue.

Noiselessly he pushed the trap further up, and at grave risk scrambled quickly out. He found, as he began to suspect, that the trap led into a trench near the waterfall.

A rapid survey showed that the

shanty had disappeared, and that the fire which had first attracted his notice proceeded from the still smouldering embers. Moreover, a clump of pines which had once stood behind the cabin had caught fire. These had fallen, but they still burned.

A noted Blackfoot chief named Spotted Eagle and half a dozen braves were standing round in various attitudes, but what startled Buffalo Bill most was the presence of Rattler Starr. The rascal confronted the chief in a threatening manner.

Rattler Starr appeared to have not long arrived on the scene, for his hard-worked pony was tethered to one of the pines, and he himself looked utterly fatigued. He was speaking, but it was difficult to catch the sense of his words, and Buffalo Bill wormed his way into the belt of pines where he could watch without being seen, and overhear clearly all that passed.

The mention of his own name first arrested his movements. Crouching in the dark shadow of a towering pine, he listened while Rattler Starr proceeded:

"Spotted Eagle is no better than his meanest squaw," the rogue cried, angrily. "He has let the Wonder Worker scout slip through his fingers, whom Rattler Starr caged for him; he has lost half his picked braves, and behold! he has burnt his paleface brother's wigwam. His young bucks will laugh him to scorn. What are Spotted Eagle, chief of the Blackfeet, and his choice warriors? Drunken thieves! White-livered cowards!"

"Let the paleface beware!" blustered the chief. "For Spotted Eagle's arm is strong and sure. Why did my paleface brother linger? Because he feared the great Wonder Worker's shooting-rod. The paleface is no warrior!"

This was said in a tone of supreme contempt, and evoked an acquiescing murmur from the sullen warriors standing by.

Rattler Starr waited till the murmur subsided, then he spoke again.

"Nevertheless, Rattler Starr is the friend of Green Hand, the mighty

medicine-man of the Blackfeet, whom neither Spotted Eagle nor his braves dare disobey," he remarked, grimly.

Buffalo Bill, who up to this time had listened quietly to these revelations of the miner's roguery, gave a slight start of surprise.

Green Hand was a familiar name along the frontier, and one to conjure with amongst the Blackfeet, who apparently regarded it with awe. Whether the owner was a living creature or a myth no one seemed to know. Some of the less credulous pioneers openly declared their disbelief in his existence. His character and attainments were shrouded in mystery. A wild rumour was current that he held a magnificent court in some island in the very heart of that unexplored region.

So much Buffalo Bill had heard in common with most frontiersmen, though up to the present he had given little credence to the extraordinary tales which were flying about concerning Green Hand.

So Rattler Starr was the associate and ally of these fierce redskins. Moreover, he had betrayed him to them. He listened anxiously to what followed.

He learnt sufficient to understand that Rattler Starr had betrayed Golden Spur Settlement into the hands of the medicine-man and his warriors.

The desire for a terrible reckoning surged up in Buffalo Bill's heart, and only the thought of his endangered friends restrained him. Not daring to linger, he crept softly back to the open trap-door in the trench, and bolting it after him, he moved through the subterranean chamber.

As he pushed forward, his foot struck some yielding substance which sent him crashing to the ground. Picking himself up, he groped towards the obstacle, and as his hands came in contact with it, he started back with a half-stifled cry. It was the body of a man—a redskin—who must have been some time dead.

Striking a flint, Buffalo Bill soon kindled a flame, and in the flickering

light examined his surroundings more closely. He turned the body over and glanced at the face, then like a flash the truth occurred to him.

The slain redskin was no other than the head chief Scar Face. He had been shot in the temple, and it was easy to see that his body had been carried there.

In the light of the disclosures which Glancing Eyes had made, the truth was not difficult to arrive at. Turning away, the scout passed quickly beneath the cascade, and finally emerged into the forest track beyond.

Returning to the place where he had picketed the pony, Buffalo Bill prepared to pass the remainder of the night there. The Blackfeet had not yet attempted to cross the gorge, and consequently there was nothing to fear from them.

The possibility of Rattler Starr passing that way did not enter into Buffalo Bill's calculations, for he could clearly anticipate the rascal's next move.

He had turned the pony loose to crop the rich though scanty grass higher up the slope, and had built a fire of pine faggots, where, rolled up comfortably in a blanket, he was watching the flickering flames, when a faint noise in the distance made him start up in alarm.

"Hands up! Who passes—friend or foe?" he demanded, rapidly.

Two figures started out of the darkness, with hands extended overhead.

"I guess we're friends, pard Buffer," said one. "Yer knows us—Big Slumper and Fan Tan, from Golden Spur."

"What brings you here?"

"That's easily told, pard. We're trailing up a friend of ours. Maybe he's with yer. We mean Rattler Starr."

The mention of the traitor's name excited Buffalo Bill's keenest interest.

"Your man is not here," he replied.

"Reckon he's not far off, pard."

"How's that?"

"We've followed his trail ter this spot."

An anxious pang shot through the scout, who began to fear for the safety of Quick Shot's little party. So long as the miners of Golden Spur remained in ignorance of what had happened to their victim, the latter had only the Blackfeet to guard against. Now, these two ruffians in trailing down Rattler Starr might have come upon the Pawnee chief's tracks. He decided to make sure.

"How do you know it's the Rattler's trail you have followed?" he asked.

"I guess, pard, it's giving the game away to tell you."

"I rather fancy it is. Still, I want to know, and it will save you a lot of trouble to tell me off-hand."

And as he spoke Buffalo Bill cocked his weapons ominously.

"You play trumps this time, pard," responded the rascal named Big Slumper. "I guess we'll tell yer. Rattler Starr's pony's been shod backwards!"

Buffalo Bill instantly comprehended the importance of this bit of news. Lowering his weapons, he bade the men step up to the fire, where he soon made them as comfortable as circumstances would permit. Their trained eyes showed them that the scout had spoken the truth when he declared that Rattler Starr was not in the camp.

"Say, pard, have yer seen Rattler?" asked Fan Tan.

Buffalo Bill nodded.

His two companions viewed him with fresh interest.

"Where are he?"

"The other side of Mountain Glen."

"Waal, ef he ain't done us, Fan Tan!" observed Big Slumper, with an angry scowl.

"He has, my friends, completely done you," Buffalo Bill interposed. "I had a very interesting conversation with him a little while ago, and he has placed me in possession of certain facts which, I fear, will make it extremely unpleasant for you both when next you visit Golden Spur. Take a friendly tip and don't return."

Buffalo Bill said this from ulterior motives. He shrewdly concluded that if he could once instil into the pair of rogues that Rattler Starr had given information against them, their tongues would be opened in self-defence, and much that now puzzled him would be made clear. He was not mistaken.

Taken completely aback, the two men fell easily into the trap and made a clean breast of their connection with Rattler Starr, striving to show that their part in his rogueries had been extremely subordinate.

Buffalo Bill finally won them over to his cause by promising them his protection if they would return with him to Golden Spur and swear out a warrant for Rattler Starr's arrest. He intimated, moreover, that the Government would be willing to pay down a handsome sum in reward for the renegade's apprehension.

"Seems ter me we ain't knocked across sich bad luck, after all, in striking this camp," whispered Fan Tan to his fellow-ruffian, as he rolled his blanket round him preparatory to snatching a few hours' sleep before dawn, a remark which Big Slumper secretly endorsed.

CHAPTER 6.

Trapped by a Lurking Foe.

DAWN brought reflection, and neither Big Slumper nor his colleague was so keen on returning to the scene of their exploits, minus Rattler Starr, as they had shown themselves on the preceding evening. Still, Buffalo Bill's six-shooters proved an argument too forcible to be withstood for long. The two rogues sullenly complied, and without any further delay the three men proceeded to go back on their tracks.

As neither Big Slumper nor Fan Tan was mounted, the pace was necessarily slow.

The shades of evening were beginning to fall when they drew near the mining settlement. As the familiar landmarks hove in sight Slumper and

Fan Tan betrayed signs of uneasiness. They felt that Buffalo Bill held their future in the hollow of his hand.

He understood their fears, and smiled grimly when he reflected how Fortune had played these rascals so neatly into his hand. Rattler Starr's course of villainy would soon be brought to an effectual stop.

His thoughts were running in a very satisfactory vein, when of a sudden an ejaculation of surprise and terror burst from Fan Tan.

"Blackfeet! The settlement's been wiped out!" he gasped.

So sudden and so full of dark meaning were the words that Buffalo Bill and Big Slumper were for some moments too completely taken aback to notice that all retreat had been cut off by the much-dreaded foe.

Fan Tan, who had been the first to round the rocky promontory which had hidden the settlement from view, was now the first to discover the danger in their rear.

Withdrawing his eyes from the fire-blackened ruins which marked the late encampment, he glanced backward with the thought of escape.

"Them varmints are dancing down our track!" he yelled.

It was only too true. The Blackfeet, seeing that their approach had been discovered, set up their terrifying war-cry, and launched a flight of arrows at the three desperate men.

Neither Slumper nor Fan Tan was hit, but Buffalo Bill's pony uttered a wild neigh of pain, and lurched heavily against the abutting cliff.

The scout managed to disengage himself, and with a swift glance at the rapidly - approaching foe, he dashed past the promontory and started after his two companions, who were running as fast as their legs could carry them down the incline towards the ford across the river.

The Blackfeet were hidden behind the promontory; their yells, however, were uncomfortably audible, and incited the fugitives to topmost speed.

All at once Fan Tan, who led, wheeled about and commenced gesti-

culating wildly. Big Slumper was the first to gain his side, and he, too, hesitated to advance further.

Almost breathless from exertion, Buffalo Bill raced up, and in a moment grasped the situation.

The ford leading to the blackened and still burning settlement was less than a hundred yards in a direct line below, while about double that distance to the left several Indian bark-canoes had been moored against a thicket of hickory growing down to the water's edge. The canoes were empty, and would afford an excellent means of escape, whereas to continue their flight into the settlement might mean speedy capture and almost certain death.

As Buffalo Bill joined the two hesitating rogues, the Blackfeet swept past the promontory above and discharged a second flight of arrows, accompanied by several bullets, at their prey. They, too, took in the situation, and prepared to cut off the fugitives' last slender hope.

A large party began to race down the rocky slope in the direction of the canoes.

"Quick! Our safety lies in reaching the canoes first!" cried Buffalo Bill.

He led the flight at a breakneck speed, for it was a race against the fleet-footed redskins as to which of the two parties should reach the canoes first. Close at his heels came Big Slumper, and Fan Tan brought up the rear.

Buffalo Bill reached the first canoe some half a dozen yards in advance of his companions. Three-parts of the craft was concealed by the overspreading foliage. He sprang inside, followed by Slumper and Fan Tan. Snatching up a paddle, the scout at one stroke sent the canoe sweeping into the current.

A yell, not of dismay, but of fierce triumph, burst from the redskins, some of whom were now not many yards from the water's edge.

The note of triumph was not lost on Buffalo Bill, who glanced over his shoulder, vaguely alarmed. To his

horror he saw Fan Tan struggling in the grasp of two Blackfeet at the further end of the canoe, while in the middle, coming towards himself, was the renegade, Rattler Starr.

In a flash Buffalo Bill understood the whole ghastly truth. The renegade had actually led the Blackfeet against the settlement, and destroyed it during the past night.

Suddenly Big Slumper, thinking to save his own life by gaining favour with Rattler Starr, flung himself upon the scout. The latter had no time to draw and fire, for his enemy took good care to secure his arms.

"What shall we do with the durned spy, boss?" demanded the rogue, as Rattler Starr crawled awkwardly up.

Ere Rattler could reply the scout made one last desperate effort, and succeeded in shifting his enemy to one side.

The canoe shot over, and a moment later its occupants were precipitated into the river.

* * * * *

The very danger attending Buffalo Bill's position proved the means of his salvation, for when the occupants of the canoe were precipitated into the river some of the Blackfeet, who meanwhile had put off in one of the other canoes, turned their attention to saving Rattler Starr, while their comrades on the bank picked off Big Slumper and Fan Tan as these two rascals bobbed up to the surface.

Big Slumper's screams for mercy, though pitiable, were not heeded by the fierce redskins, who, with all the fiendish cruelty of their race, began to transfix him with arrows, taking care, however, to avoid a mortal spot. Fan Tan was killed outright.

Some minutes elapsed ere Rattler Starr sufficiently recovered to call the redskins' attention to the fact that the most important fugitive, Buffalo Bill, was not accounted for.

And then, scan the surface of the stream as they might, they could not descry him. Rattler Starr was furious, and in obedience to his directions, two or three canoes immediately put off in search of the scout.

Meanwhile Buffalo Bill had undergone a life and death struggle beneath the surface of the swift-flowing river. The coils of hide rope had become entangled in his limbs in such a manner that, while his struggles kept him beneath the water, the line continued to hamper his limbs more and more effectually.

At last, in sheer desperation, he ceased to struggle, and almost simultaneously the force of the current bore him to the surface. He gasped hungrily for breath, and finding that the current was likely to keep him afloat, he turned his attention to his late foes.

Darkness was stealing down, and he could just distinguish the canoes laden with keen-eyed redskins, who he knew were looking for him.

Never before had he longed for speedy darkness as he did then.

Once or twice his hopes sank to zero as a canoe came sweeping across the water towards him, but a sudden turn to either the right or left showed that he had not been discovered.

He was being carried swiftly along by the current, and presently, to his indescribable relief, the coil slipped from one of his legs and he was free.

Buffalo Bill now began a struggle against the force of the current. The struggle did much to set the blood circulating freely in his chilled body. For more than an hour he fought on, when suddenly he was thrown in violent contact against a tangle of drifting logs.

He managed to drag himself up into the midst of the heap, and slowly unwound the tangle of hide rope, and then looped it round his waist. It struck him that a fire would not come amiss, while it would be hardly likely to betray him to the Blackfeet, who were now miles behind.

He had learned the art of making a fire with damp wood from Quick Shot, the Pawnee chieftain, and in a short time he produced a merry blaze in the middle of the tangle of bush and logs. By its genial heat he was enabled to dry his clothes and secure a long rest before day broke.

TRAPPED BY A LURKING FOE.

When he awoke the fire had burned through to the water, and was almost out. The sun was shining through a thin mist, giving a dismal look to the sides of the gorge. No sign of life was visible, and a death-like silence brooded over the mighty river.

The tangle of logs must have struck a fresh current during the night, for the gorge, through which Buffalo Bill was being carried, was not familiar to him. Presently the tangle of logs was swept perilously close to the base of an enormous perpendicular ridge, which formed part of the mountain chain.

By-and-by he fancied he could detect a distant roar. For a while he was unable to discover how or where it originated; but on rounding a rocky promontory he was whirled by the increasing speed of the current towards an immense fissure in the mountain-side.

About five hundred yards ahead a low, ragged archway bent across the width of the stream, which narrowed considerably at that point. It was shrouded in a ghostly white canopy, which rose and fell in misty clouds. Its greatest density was below, and Buffalo Bill saw at once that it was caused by the spray rising from some terrific waterfall.

He realised with a shudder that he was being whirled towards those unknown falls, towards sure and speedy death. There seemed no chance of escape. Even if he plunged into the water and breasted the current, which was hardly possible, the walls of the gorge were perpendicular for more than a thousand feet up.

He rapidly scanned both sides as he was borne along to the roaring cataract ahead.

Suddenly he brightened. His eye had detected, three or four hundred yards away, on the right hand, and possibly fifty feet above the water, that the rocky wall, for some little distance had been hollowed out. There was very likely a narrow shelf behind the frowning exterior.

A plan presented itself to Buffalo Bill. He noosed the end of the hide

rope and decided to cast it at the break in the rock, on the slender chance that it might hold there. The driftwood was tearing down the stream about thirty feet from the frowning wall of the gorge.

Buffalo Bill stood ready to cast the line as the driftwood shot by the ledge. One end of the line he had fastened securely to his middle, the rest he held coiled in his left hand. Fortunately, the length was considerable, and thus the noose end was able to have full play. He hurled the line out, and it cut the air in a graceful curve, and struck the rock above the ledge. For one brief moment it remained there suspended, then the scout's heart sank as he watched the noose scrape down the side of the gorge.

Nothing could save him from that awful plunge on the fall now. The water swirled over the tangle of logs, separating some and jostling the remainder into a shapeless heap. For one moment the driftwood rode the brink of the thundering fall, then shivered and went over.

Buffalo Bill hardly expected to escape, still he clung with desperate energy to one of the loosened logs, wondering how many seconds it would take to engulf him beneath the swirl and rush of those dreadful falls.

Far down beneath the spray he caught a glimpse of green water, which, to his excited imagination, seemed to be drawn tight from rock to rock. A hoarse, rasping sound, like the thunder of many guns vibrated in his ears, and with teeth closed he waited for the end.

All at once he felt the rope tighten about his middle. The violent jerk threatened to dislocate his back. Many tons of falling water seemed to engulf him; then, battered and beaten, his hold on the log was torn away.

The spray was blinding, and some time elapsed before he understood his amazing position. The rope was cutting painfully into his ribs, his legs were horribly numbed, but with his hands and arms he struggled hard to

THE PAWNEE CHIEF.

secure the extended line. The very moment he succeeded the awful strain on his middle was relieved.

It was then that, glancing upwards, Buffalo Bill made out, beyond the cloud of spray which hovered above, a pair of enormous mountain eagles. Their curious movements arrested his attention.

Slowly the amazing truth was borne in upon him. The noose of the line had fastened together the legs of the two great birds!

Nothing short of a miracle had saved him. In throwing the noose, he must have unwittingly lassoed the pair of eagles in their eyrie, and thus the struggles of the great birds had snatched him from the swirling gulch below.

Once certain of his position, Buffalo Bill was not slow to note the rest of his surroundings. The ragged archway, which bent across the width of the stream, did not bridge it where the flood fell into the gorge below, but at a point some distance further on. Being covered with drifting spray, it looked as if it was composed entirely of irregular blocks of ice. The water dropped for nearly a thousand feet into a seething bed, which further on widened out into a broad river. At its further extremity the whole weight of the river cannoned off a ledge of glittering quartz, and shooting away swirled in a smother of foam out of sight.

Buffalo Bill was astonished by the sight of such enormous mineral wealth; the walls of the unknown waterway fairly glistened with gold, yet it was absolutely inaccessible. This, indeed, he soon had reason to know; for the present he was quite helpless, hovering between life and death, poised just above the seething flood.

It must have been the force of his descent which had torn the captive birds from their mountain eyrie. They were screaming overhead, and struggling to free themselves.

He shuddered as he watched them, for they looked decidedly dangerous.

For some minutes Buffalo Bill swung

like a living pendulum from side to side. To his horror it was clear that the extent of his movement was increasing. Nearer and nearer he approached the cruel dip, for if once the swirl of the river enveloped him, his chance of life was very small.

A blast of wind swept down the gorge and blew a cloud of spray over the helpless scout. He felt the line drop. A sickening fear seized him. The loud thunder of the waters smothered every other sound; the spray completely blinded and nearly choked him. He was plunged into the flood and jerked violently along down the frowning gorge where daylight scarcely penetrated.

For a considerable distance Buffalo Bill was borne along through that impassable mountain gorge at a terrible risk of being dashed to pieces against abutting ledges and jagged crags. It was clear to him that the struggles of the birds overhead were growing weaker. He trembled to think of what must happen when the exhausted creatures, no longer able to soar, should come swooping down, letting the line run loose. It would then be impossible for him to withstand the force of the current.

He was on the very point of despair, when suddenly he was carried at a terrific speed by the current through the narrow neck of the gorge, and swept onward into the bosom of the mighty Missouri.

He recognised the main stream by the numerous timber-clad islands which dotted its vast surface.

CHAPTER 7.

In the Power of the Scalper.

BUFFALO BILL saw his chance, and meant to seize it. The current would bear him alongside the middle island, unless the birds should by their struggles alter his present course. He noted, with some misgiving, that the great birds were scaring more directly overhead, and in consequence the line was beginning to strain again at his waist.

IN THE POWER OF THE SCALPER.

The little strength that remained in his chilled and stiffened body he began to exert. He strove hard to get at his hunting-knife, and after several futile efforts he managed to secure it, and with a few slashes severed that dreadful rope.

Released from the scout's weight, the eagles shot high up into the heavens, and quickly disentangled the line about their claws. Buffalo Bill watched them circle over the pine-tops out of sight. Then once more he gave his whole attention to his immediate surroundings.

He reached the island after an heroic struggle, and dropped helplessly to the ground in a state of sheer exhaustion.

By this time the rays of the sun had become very powerful, and, with the presence of mind of a true frontiersman, he divested himself of his drenched garments and spread them out to dry, himself seeking shelter and rest inside the thicket.

It was whilst resting thus that he suddenly detected an object some little distance away that filled him with a vague fear. He crept cautiously forward and picked it up.

To anyone not versed in the dangers of that wild country there was little in that oddly-arranged plume of green feathers, held together by a bone clasp, to excite alarm.

To Buffalo Bill they spoke of the presence of redskins. Some brave must have lost this plume whilst hunting in this very thicket, yet, in spite of this conclusion, the scout could discover no Indian signs in the immediate vicinity. The closer he examined the plume the more was he puzzled. At first he had supposed that it had fallen from some warrior's bonnet, but the manner of its setting made that idea improbable.

It was more likely a totem, and, as such, might prove extremely serviceable to him. He decided to retain it, and fastened it upon the lapel of his coat, which, being dry, he proceeded to don with the rest of his clothing.

He was feeling desperately hungry, when happening to glance up through a glade of pines he caught sight of a beautiful white-tail deer. The animal usually so alert and fleet of foot was limping painfully; evidently it had suffered badly in an encounter with another beast.

A well-directed shot from the scout's revolver killed the brute outright.

Very soon Buffalo Bill had a fire burning, and roasting the tongue of the slain deer, he made a hearty meal, and afterwards felt hugely refreshed. Taking care to secure the remains of the savoury meal, he started forth to explore the island.

Its extent surprised him, and he began to fancy that he must have landed on a jutting portion of the left bank.

Night drew on, and he had not covered anything like the extent of the forest when the necessity of finding suitable shelter was forced upon him.

He had come across no signs of Indians, and he began to hope that his fears in the earlier part of the day were not going to be realised. Still, caution was necessary, and deeming it inadvisable to kindle another fire, he made himself as comfortable as possible under a cluster of hickory wood.

The scout was soon asleep, but his rest was troubled, and he awoke at last with a start under the impression that he was being tortured by Spotted Eagle while Rattler Starr looked on.

He got up and stretched himself, and moved a few paces away, when a faint sound of voices reached him, and he caught sight of a tiny gleam of light. Crawling cautiously forward, he perceived a number of redskins seated round their camp-fire. All were smoking, and in the dim light he managed to catch a glimpse of their fierce faces.

They were Blackfeet!

As Buffalo Bill made this discovery he backed precipitately, and the sound instantly roused the keen-eared warriors. One of them wheeled swiftly

round, and fastened his eyes on the spot where the scout crouched in anxious suspense.

Buffalo Bill saw that he was discovered. Seizing a tomahawk, the Blackfoot uttered a loud war-whoop, and sprang like a panther at the paleface.

The scout made a feint of grappling with the redskin, and then by a well-timed move darted between his enemy's legs. Before he could assume the defensive, however, his active foe had wheeled about, and with another deafening yell renewed the attack.

Meanwhile, the rest of the Blackfeet were coming on, gliding through the forest, and it was not long ere Buffalo Bill was overpowered and thrown to the ground.

He knew very well that his life was hardly worth a moment's purchase. His recent assailant dropped the tomahawk and whipped from his moccasins a long, keen-edged scalping-knife.

Of a sudden, however, one of the Blackfeet who had been holding the captive down leaped to his feet, and flinging himself upon the scalper, dragged him back.

A furious struggle followed.

The totem which Buffalo Bill had picked up when he first reached the island was snatched from his jacket and thrust into the first redskin's grasp. He turned it over, gazed at it for a moment in stupefied silence, then, with another glance at the prostrate scout, he uttered his horrible war-cry and leaped upon his assailant.

The latter was prepared, and before the wretch could get in a stroke, he received a fearful blow from the other's tomahawk. He dropped forward on to his knees. In a moment the second Blackfoot buried the tomahawk into the wounded brave's skull. Without a single cry he rolled over like a log.

Buffalo Bill, who had watched the tragedy in anxious suspense, saw that he owed his preservation not to any kindly motive on the part of his fierce champion, but to the lucky possession of the totem.

All eyes were turned upon him, and he felt it incumbent on him to act the part of a friendly paleface. The mind acts swiftly in times of dire peril. The scout felt sure that his captors had not penetrated his disguise, and acting on this supposition he addressed them in a tone of injured surprise.

"Let my redskin brothers return to the paleface hunter his totem," he cried. "It was given to him many moons ago by the great chief of the Blackfoot nation."

The warriors eyed their captive suspiciously. Nevertheless, the one who had slain Buffalo Bill's assailant picked the plume of green feathers up, and after examining them carefully handed them back to the scout.

But if Buffalo Bill supposed that the possession of the mysterious totem would insure his freedom he was grievously mistaken, for the Blackfeet, with their customary caution, were determined that he should remain their prisoner until he should satisfactorily account for his presence on the island.

On the right-hand bank of a large tributary to the Missouri, and not more than five-and-twenty miles from Silver Gulch, a vast belt of pines, thickly interlaced, offered the Blackfeet an admirable camping-place.

It was here after a period of three weeks that Buffalo Bill was taken by his captors, who, for Blackfeet, treated him with unusual respect. Indeed, he was given a certain amount of freedom and allowed to pass in and out of the camp at will. At first the thought of escape was uppermost in his mind, but he soon found that the Blackfeet held all the avenues leading from the pine belt.

Each day that passed brought further redskins in, and at last, late one evening, a fierce war-whoop from a party of young bucks who had been posted as sentinels some distance from the camp betokened the arrival of an important force.

The whole camp, bucks, squaws, and warriors, turned out to meet the fresh arrivals.

IN THE POWER OF THE SCALPER.

They proved to be the section of the Blackfeet tribe known as Buffalo Tails, under Spotted Eagle, who brought with them a quantity of rich plunder from Golden Spur. Rattler Starr did not accompany them.

The chief was quick to catch sight of Buffalo Bill, and an ugly scowl gathered on his face.

He turned to one of the head Blackfeet in the camp, and Buffalo Bill guessed that he was the subject of discussion; for, having listened to the warrior for some moments, Spotted Eagle again glanced sharply at the scout, but this time with a look of alarm.

What could it mean? Buffalo Bill asked himself that question over and over again, but he could hit on no satisfactory solution. It surprised him to find as the days passed by that Spotted Eagle made no attempt to interrogate him. He did not openly at least approach the lodge which Buffalo Bill occupied.

A day or two later Buffalo Bill was passing, towards early evening, through one of the deepest glades of the forest, when a movement in the boughs of one of the largest trees drew his eyes upon the half-hidden figure of a redskin crawling stealthily along from branch to branch.

A noise from behind startled Buffalo Bill, and the figure disappeared in a twinkling. Instantly a couple of Blackfeet, gliding through the gloom, came up with him. At the same moment the cracking of a twig put both braves on the alert.

One of them commenced to climb the tree, and disappeared behind the branch of another pine.

Several minutes passed, then the silence was broken by a sharp, angry snarl, followed almost immediately by the sound of a heavy fall. Buffalo Bill and the second brave dashed forward in time to witness the despatch of the first Blackfoot. His redskin assailant plunged a knife into his heart, but ere he could withdraw it the second Blackfoot rushed upon him.

It was difficult to distinguish the

combatants, and Buffalo Bill had not decided on what course to pursue, when he heard his own name pronounced in the Pawnee tongue. Instantly the truth flashed upon him. His faithful ally, Quick Shot, had discovered his place of captivity, and had come to rescue him.

But already the noise of the scuffle had alarmed the warriors in camp. Buffalo Bill saw that there was not a moment to lose. Springing forward, he seized the Pawnee's assailant, and tearing him away flung him with stunning force to the ground.

"May the Great Spirit be thanked! Quick Shot's paleface brother lives!" gasped the Pawnee chief, leaping to his feet.

He would have said more, but Buffalo Bill hurriedly silenced him.

"Hasten under cover," he cried. "The Blackfeet are coming up. If they discover you we are both lost."

"Where is the Wonder Worker's lodge?"

"The one in the middle of the camp."

"It is well. Quick Shot will join his brother to-night."

A moment later Buffalo Bill was left alone, standing over the body of the slain Blackfoot, from which Quick Shot, with extraordinary presence of mind, had withdrawn his scalping-knife. The scout felt a fierce grip upon his arm, and, wheeling round, he could just distinguish in the dim light the evil face of Spotted Eagle.

He struck the Blackfoot chief a sharp blow with his fist, and before the wretch could recover himself, Buffalo Bill grappled with him, and after a short, sharp struggle, the two rolled heavily to the ground.

Spotted Eagle fought desperately. He was about Buffalo Bill's own size, and hardened to all the perils of the chase. Twice he almost broke away, but the scout clung to him like a bulldog.

At this point, however, fresh help arrived, and Buffalo Bill was overpowered and carried by three braves into camp, and thrown once more into the lodge.

A strong guard had been posted outside the lodge, and he could distinctly hear the angry muttering of the redskins, who were apparently determined that he should have no further chance of escape. One of their number had stationed himself inside the lodge near the bearskin which served as a door, and which was now stretched tightly from side to side.

As Buffalo Bill stirred he was surprised to receive a sign from the redskin, who motioned him by a gesture to remain still.

An hour dragged slowly by, and the noise outside had subsided, when Buffalo Bill saw the redskin wriggle close up to the fire and make a feint of going to sleep.

Presently he divested himself of the Blackfoot's bonnet and glanced sharply at the captive, who distinguished underneath the daub of paint his ally's familiar features.

Quick Shot, for it was indeed he, began to move slowly closer to the helpless captive. A slight movement near the draped aperture caused him once again to feign sleep. After another torturing pause he crept close up to Buffalo Bill.

"Let not my paleface brother wonder," he whispered. "Quick Shot secured this disguise days ago. When my brother was struggling with the bad chief he joined the Blackfeet warriors. The great Wonder Worker must escape."

"How did Quick Shot discover that his paleface brother was here?"

"The Blackfeet have long tongues," came the significant reply. "Many days did Quick Shot linger at Silver Gulch, waiting for his brother who never came."

"Are the young paleface and the Indian maiden safe?" interrupted the scout.

"They hold the Pawnee chief's camp at Silver Gulch. They are well," replied the scout's ally, in an undertone.

There was a pause, then Quick Shot continued:

"My paleface brother is safe until

Green Hand comes," he whispered, "for does he not possess the medicine-man's charm?"

"How does Quick Shot know that?"

"Many moons ago he watched the Green Hand——"

He broke off suddenly, for a movement outside—so slight that even Buffalo Bill did not catch it—had warned him that the warriors were still on the alert.

He remained in a listening attitude for some time, then continued hurriedly, but in the same undertone:

"Let the great Wonder Worker be warned, for the Blackfeet are looking for the arrival of Green Hand. The medicine-man should be here before the dawn breaks, so much did the Pawnee chief gather."

"We must escape," whispered Buffalo Bill.

"Not together," returned his cautious ally. "The paleface must clothe himself in the Blackfeet robes and cross the water pass beyond the forest."

Again his speech was interrupted, this time by the sound of fierce yells outside.

"They are coming!" Buffalo Bill exclaimed.

In a trice the Pawnee chief drew his knife and cut through the scout's thongs. Then, with a cry of thanksgiving, Buffalo Bill sprang to his feet and made a dash for the bearskin door.

Quick Shot followed close in the rear.

Suddenly the skin was torn from its fastenings, and two fierce warriors leaped into the room.

CHAPTER 8.

Between Two Fires and Against Desperate Odds.

SIMULTANEOUSLY Quick Shot flung the skin over the hindmost Indian, who at once dropped his tomahawk and desperately attempted to extricate himself. In the rush the fire had been scattered, and Buffalo Bill with the Pawnee slipped out of the lodge un-

BETWEEN TWO FIRES AND AGAINST DESPERATE ODDS.

seen by the two warriors, who, in the uncertain light within the lodge, must have mistaken each other for enemies, since they were now fighting with all the ferocity of their nation.

The bearskin which had become entangled round the first warrior aided the deception, while the fact that he possessed no weapon caused his fellow-brave to fancy that it was Buffalo Bill with whom he was struggling, while owing to the unfortunate wretch's encumbrance he was unable to make his yells heard.

Both were pretty evenly matched so far as strength went, but the armed warrior possessed an advantage which he very promptly used.

As five or six warriors rushed up to the lodge, a thud told the fugitives that the weapon had done its deadly work. The other Blackfeet uttered a savage yell, and rushed pell-mell into the lodge.

"Follow across the open space. The warriors will not see," whispered Quick Shot.

Buffalo Bill needed no further urging. The light in the open space was not great, for most of the camp-fires had been either extinguished or allowed to go out. The whole encampment had been roused, and the open space as the two fugitives reached it was filled with warriors darting hither and thither. In the confusion it was not difficult to escape notice.

In a couple of minutes or so they gained the extremity of the camp, but at the turn of one of the many trails that led from the Blackfeet camp, the fugitives came in sight of one of the outlying fires. It was a large one, and blazing merrily some distance ahead. They approached it cautiously.

Several ponies were corralled near by.

"Get them out," whispered the scout.

Quick Shot did not hesitate, but it was easier to give the order than to carry it out, for the moment the Pawnee chief opened the corral the ponies, already excited by the yells of

the Blackfeet, stampeded. As if by magic a number of warriors appeared on all sides amid the trees.

Rendered desperate by this unsuspected danger, the two fugitives pressed back into the shadow, their eyes riveted on the approaching circle of redskins, who, making never a sound, drew their ever-narrowing circle nearer and nearer.

Their movements as well as their silence induced Buffalo Bill to believe that they fancied their presence had not been discovered.

Unknown to him, however, two or three warriors had stalked up behind, and were about to fling themselves upon him. Quick Shot was the first to discover their proximity, and exerting every atom of strength he possessed, he seized Buffalo Bill and flung him wildly against one of the ponies, which, in a vain attempt to avoid the cordon of redskins, had backed into the camp-fire. The brute uttered a neigh of fear and instantly bolted.

The instinct of self-preservation induced the scout to cling to this one slender chance. A yell from behind was the first intimation she had that the Blackfeet were so near. With one leg thrown over the terrified pony's back, and clinging tenaciously to the poor little brute's neck, Buffalo Bill threw one sweeping glance over his shoulder.

He caught a glimpse of Quick Shot scaling a tree, while several fierce Blackfeet were striving to bring him down. Then the scout was forced to lie as flat as he could along the pony's back, in order to avoid detection while the crazed brute dashed right through a crowd of Blackfeet warriors.

The scout held his breath in painful suspense. A couple of redskins sprang forward in a vain effort to stay the brute's flight. They failed, but simultaneously they discovered the presence of the fugitive.

A fierce yell issued from the rest, who, wheeling round, tried to outrace the pony. For some distance the struggle resolved itself into a neck

and neck chase, but gradually the animal's fleetness began to tell on the pursuing redskins.

Dawn found the pony with its rider mounting a steep mountain track, whose surface seemed to narrow as it wound about the precipitous sides of a mighty gorge.

Glancing behind, Buffalo Bill was horrified to behold a dozen or more Blackfeet who were giving chase on their fleet mustangs.

They were gaining upon him!

He urged the pony on frantically, while now and again he took an anxious glance round to note what progress his enemies were making.

On one of these occasions the pony stumbled, and the violent jerk sent Buffalo Bill over towards the precipice.

He lost his grip, and for a moment it looked as if no power on earth could save him. One of the warriors, the second in close pursuit, had anticipated the danger to the fugitive, and sitting bolt-upright on the back of his fiery little mustang, he had carefully adjusted an arrow to his bow, and now at the critical moment he took aim at the scout; fearful lest after all the paleface should escape his vengeance.

The arrow was well aimed, though instead of striking Buffalo Bill it glanced across the pony's neck.

Rearing up, the little brute staggered back upon its haunches.

That swift movement saved Buffalo Bill's life. Clutching out for some means of support, he managed to seize the brute's mane.

The pony uttered an almost human cry, and raced madly up the ever-narrowing track, while Buffalo Bill, with both hands gripping its long mane, swung over the awful gorge.

He was hovering verily between life and death. Would the fearful struggle never end? he wondered.

An arrow whizzed by him.

Another pierced his jacket under his right arm. Every moment he feared that the wounded pony would reel and pitch over the yawning preci-

pice. In that case he must be crushed to death beneath its weight at the bottom of the chasm many thousand feet below. He could see the cruel rocks gaping up at him as if in mockery of his agonising position.

The gorge was not very wide, and there was a small ledge upon the opposite side.

At this supreme moment an inspiration seized him; he would swing from the pony's mane on to the jutting track. He knew that his life depended on the attempt, for the Blackfeet were now not more than ten yards behind, while the pony was swaying dangerously from side to side.

Buffalo Bill drew a deep breath as he plunged down, missed the ledge, and, dropping with frightful velocity, disappeared into the black chasm beneath. To the scout an age seemed to pass before he struck something which yielded to his weight.

He was too badly shaken to move for some minutes. The grey light of early morning was stealing down the sides of the chasm. A slight movement close at hand arrested the scout's attention.

A groan, followed by an oath, smote his ear, and a second later the figure of a man rose before his line of vision.

Half-dazed Buffalo Bill staggered up face to face with Rattler Starr!

"Pard Buffler, I——"

The villain got no further; quick as thought Buffalo Bill, realising that it would never do to let Rattler know that he was unarmed, sprang at him and felled him to the ground.

"You treacherous hound!" he exclaimed, standing over the prostrate renegade. "If you stir a foot I'll shoot you like a dog! And I want the truth. Tell me, what has brought you here?"

"Gold."

"And something else."

Rattler Starr shook his head and whined out a positive denial.

There was just sufficient light at the bottom of the chasm to disclose the two men to each other, and Rattler

BETWEEN TWO FIRES AND AGAINST DESPERATE ODDS.

Starr, finding himself unassailed by either bullet or knife, began to suspect the truth.

Buffalo Bill for his part knew only too well that when the daylight increased his enemy must discover his utter powerlessness. He must act promptly if he acted at all.

Retreating partly behind the cover of the dense bush, which grew abundantly at the bottom of the chasm, he ordered the renegade to get up.

"I've got you covered. Hands up!" he cried.

Reluctantly the other extended his hands above his head.

Truth to tell, Rattler Starr was puzzled how to act. He stared hard at the scout, and tried to discover whether he really did possess a weapon, and if so whether that weapon was extended towards him.

"Listen to me!" Buffalo Bill continued. "Not content with encompassing the end of a promising young miner, you must needs instigate a horrible massacre. It was you who led the Blackfeet against Golden Spur; it was you who incited them to slay every living soul there. Your catalogues of crimes would take a long time to rehearse. What have you to say for yourself?"

"I guess, pard, you can't prove nothing."

"I happen to have overheard a certain private conversation in Mountain Glen."

The rascal started.

"Anything else?" he demanded.

"Yes; in the cellar beneath the cabin I found the corpse of Scar Face, the Blackfoot chief. Again that was your work."

"Seems ter me, pard Buffler, that me and you knows too much of this affair," said the rascal, with a hoarse laugh.

His tone made the scout uncomfortable, for it was unmistakably defiant. Possibly the rogue had discovered his weaponless condition. And, indeed, this conclusion was instantly proved to be correct; for, ere Buffalo Bill could assume the offen-

sive, his enemy sprang forward and grappled with him.

Taken at a disadvantage, and already exhausted by his long and hazardous flight from the Blackfeet camp, Buffalo Bill was unable to offer anything but a very feeble resistance. To his surprise, his assailant made no attempt to take his life, but contented himself by snatching away the totem fastened to Buffalo Bill's coat.

As an after-thought he struck the scout a cruel blow with the butt-end of his rifle, and, seeing him drop senseless, darted through the bushes, and was lost to sight.

The rascal had taken to his heels not without cause. A noise up the gorge had excited his fears. It was the sound of many feet.

The truth flashed upon him. The Blackfeet who had pursued the scout were coming down the gorge, and he had good reason for not wishing them to discover him under those circumstances.

The sounds grew nearer, and then more distant, until they faded from hearing altogether.

Daylight streamed down the gorge, and the sun streaked the precipitous sides, when at length the unconscious figure stirred.

Midday was approaching when Buffalo Bill had sufficiently recovered to pick up the trail of his crafty foe, whom he was determined to run to earth.

He had long lost all sense of locality, and this was not surprising, seeing that the spot in which he now found himself boasted neither timber nor bush of any sort or description. Hemmed in on three sides by great, gaunt, receding cliffs, with never a tuft of grass to relieve the barren monotony, but plentifully sprinkled with enormous boulders and rugged with stones, the valley offered to the eye a spectacle of weird grandeur.

Buffalo Bill had trailed his enemy to a great sombre-looking boulder, which, in the quick-gathering darkness, loomed indistinctly ahead. He halted, undecided whether to advance or describe a circle round the boulder.

THE PAWNEE CHIEF.

While he was thus pausing, a circumstance occurred which startled him more than he cared to acknowledge, even to himself.

A burst of blue flame seemed to come all at once out of the very bowels of the earth.

At the same moment an arrow whizzed perilously near. Then, standing forth out of the bluish flame, appeared a ghastly-looking redskin. There was something so horrible, so repulsive in the stranger's look, that Buffalo Bill recoiled with a shudder.

The mysterious redskin uttered a piercing scream, unlike any yell which the scout had heard in the course of his wild life amongst the Indians. Almost simultaneously he sprang forward, and in the weird light Buffalo Bill saw that both his arms and hands were green from the tips of the fingers up to the elbows, where they were covered by the short sleeves of a tightly-drawn vest. The latter bore a strange design of twisted serpents, their eyes represented by some metal which glinted horribly in the weird light.

These details Buffalo Bill took in at a glance. He had no time to note more, for the redskin leaped at him with an impetuosity which he was ill-prepared to resist.

They grappled, and the struggle lasted some minutes. Being unarmed, Buffalo Bill's whole attention was occupied in preventing his assailant from using the scalping-knife which he had drawn. He succeeded in this, but could not prevent his enemy from tripping him up and flinging him to the ground.

The fall shook Buffalo Bill badly, and before he could make an effort to rise, his assailant placed one foot on his chest, and, adjusting the knife, made a stroke downward at his helpless foe.

Then all suddenly there sounded the war-whoop of Buffalo Bill's Pawnee ally. The yell was followed by the report of a rifle, and the redskin staggered.

Buffalo Bill glanced in the direction whence the shot had come, and

in the dim reflection of the blue flame he saw Quick Shot advance at a run. The Pawnee chief's features were visible, and they disclosed something more than uneasiness. He drew back suddenly, uttering a sharp exclamation of wonder and fear.

"Green Hand, the Blackfoot medicine-man!" he ejaculated.

A scream burst from the much-dreaded chief. He waved his sickly green hands and arms in the manner of a huge bat, trying by this pantomime to still further startle the Pawnee.

It was an ill-advised move, for Buffalo Bill, taking advantage of his assailant's pause, sprang to his feet, and before the rascal could recover from his surprise, or even attempt to recover his lost advantage, he found himself in the tenacious grip of the scout.

This time the advantage was all on Buffalo Bill's side, who succeeded not only in wresting the knife from him, but in securing his arms.

Calling to his ally to hasten up, the scout suddenly snatched the bonnet of green plumes from his enemy's head, and tore from his face a sort of skin mask.

"Let not my Pawnee brother fear!" he cried. "Behold, the Green Hand is the renegade and coward, Rattler Starr!"

As the mask peeled off the wretch's face the well-known features of the renegade were exposed to the Pawnee's startled view. In a moment his fear of the man vanished, and springing to the scout's side, he helped the latter to secure the wretch.

Rattler Starr betrayed no shade of surprise or fear at sight of the Pawnee, and a terrible dread occurred to Buffalo Bill. It was clear that the renegade must have been aware that Quick Shot had escaped the horrible death to which the Golden Spur settlers had doomed him. How had he learned the truth? There could be only one answer. He must have encountered Tom Tasker and Valley Flower, in which case their fate was probably sealed.

THE TRAGIC FATE OF GREEN HAND.

Buffalo Bill determined to put his fears to a crucial test.

"If you value your life," he cried, in a low, steady tone, "tell the truth. What have you done with Tom Tasker and the Indian maiden, Valley Flower?"

Rattler Starr gave himself completely away, and confessed that he had captured Tom and Valley Flower and imprisoned them in Lone Cabin, so called because it not only stood alone on the southern bank of the Missouri River, but because it was held by Indians and trappers alike to be haunted, and on no account would anyone venture there.

"You rascal! For two pins I'd shoot you now!" Buffalo Bill cried.

"I guess, pard, that ain't your ticket to play," came Rattler Starr's reply. "You may kill me, but in that case I guess you will never recover your friends, for their retreat is cut off. The river is in flood."

"The bad paleface speaks the truth," Quick Shot said.

Rattler Starr saw his chance.

"You will not kill me," he said, in a taunting voice. "You will unbind me and let me go, and in return I will supply you with a canoe and what you may need. I guess it's a bargain, pard Buffler, and if yer want ter see ther gal and Tom Tasker alive, yer'll cry 'Done.'"

Much as Buffalo Bill disliked making terms with the rascal, the circumstances forced him to it. Then, for once in his life, Rattler Starr was as good as his word. His thongs were removed, and with Buffalo Bill on one side and Quick Shot on the other, he led the way out of the barren valley to a place on the Missouri bank where several Indian canoes were fastened. Into one of these Buffalo Bill and his ally scrambled, while Rattler Starr, having fulfilled his mission, turned back, and was quickly lost to sight.

Hastily the two men sent the canoe shooting away from the bank, for they feared treachery, and after considerable difficulty they gained the opposite side at a point not far from the cabin of a lonely trapper.

The trapper greeted them hospitably, but he listened gravely to their errand, and when Buffalo Bill asked for his assistance, he shook his head.

It was more than his life was worth, he declared, adding that he dared not offend the Blackfeet. Notwithstanding, he readily supplied Buffalo Bill with a servicable mustang, also with a rifle and a brace of revolvers.

Thus equipped, Buffalo Bill decided to start forth along the southern bank of the mighty flood, whilst Quick Shot sped along in the canoe. Lone Cabin stood some six miles lower down the river.

CHAPTER 9.

The Tragic Fate of Green Hand.

BUFFALO BILL soon found that the usual trail along the river-bank was impassable owing to the rapid rise of the water. He was, therefore, compelled to push inland for some distance, and so approach Lone Cabin by a considerable detour. Nothing daunted, he urged the mustang on, making the best time possible under the circumstances.

It was late in the afternoon when, at last, he emerged from a narrow gorge on to the direct trail leading to Lone Cabin.

The sight which met his eyes sent a rush of cold blood to his heart. Lone Cabin stood out some distance from the bank, surrounded by a swirling flood. It was a frame-built house, and part of its foundations must have been undermined by the force of the water. The little building was straining and tugging and rocking under every succeeding shock.

Standing near the cabin, with its trunk submerged for several feet, was an oak-tree against which Quick Shot in the canoe had been hurled by the force of the swirling current.

The canoe was smashed into matchwood, and the Pawnee chief was struggling frantically against the terrible element which threatened every moment to sweep him off.

Next moment the horror of the

THE PAWNEE CHIEF.

situation was increased. The cabin gave one terrible lurch, and for half a second disappeared, only to reappear lower down the flood and go drifting away with the swiftly-flowing current.

Dazed for a moment by the nature of the occurrence, the scout did not observe his ally's peril till the Pawnee chief, catching sight of him, made a gesture for help.

Buffalo Bill plunged his spurs into his animal's flanks and forced the brute at a run into the water.

He kept his gaze riveted on Quick Shot, who had managed to fling the end of a leather lariat about the forking branches of the live oak, and with the other end wound about his form he was worming his way slowly up the trunk.

Quick Shot made a gallant struggle for life, and finally succeeded in reaching the fork in the trunk of the tree some distance above the flood.

Still Buffalo Bill struggled on. He was nearing the tree, when all at once something prompted him to glance behind, and then for the first time did he become aware of a danger that was threatening.

Three canoes filled with Blackfeet were rapidly approaching. An arrow sped by, then another, and another. The mustang was struck. The poor brute plunged madly, gravely jeopardising Buffalo Bill's safety.

Seeing the scout's peril, Quick Shot flung him the end of the lariat.

Buffalo Bill caught it deftly, and, struggling round in the saddle, brought up his rifle and let fly two shots in rapid succession at the oncoming foe. In the forepart of the first canoe stood Rattler Starr, once more in the guise of Green Hand, urging on his deluded braves.

The second shot from the scout's rifle struck him full in the temple, and he dropped back, uttering a piercing scream.

Then a strange thing happened. Instead of coming on in a frenzy of rage as Buffalo Bill expected, the Blackfeet suddenly drew up their paddles and let the canoe float with the current.

Speedily the two rear canoes came

up with the foremost one, and whilst they drifted along towards the live oak into which Buffalo Bill had now climbed, their occupants seemed to be holding a hurried council of war.

Suddenly the redskins to a man threw up their hands, and Buffalo Bill knew that their mission was one of peace. He lowered his rifle as the canoes came up.

An explanation of the amazing change in the demeanour of the Blackfeet was soon forthcoming. They had discovered Green Hand's imposture, and looked upon the scout as their avenger. Spotted Eagle professed genuine gratitude.

Whatever his feelings may have been afterwards, he acted up to them loyally then. Not only did he save Buffalo Bill and his redskin ally from a watery grave, but with the assistance of his warriors he recovered Tom and Valley Flower from the derelict cabin.

Some weeks later an interesting wedding was celebrated at Fork Cook, when Tom Tasker made the beautiful Indian, Valley Flower, his wife.

THE END.

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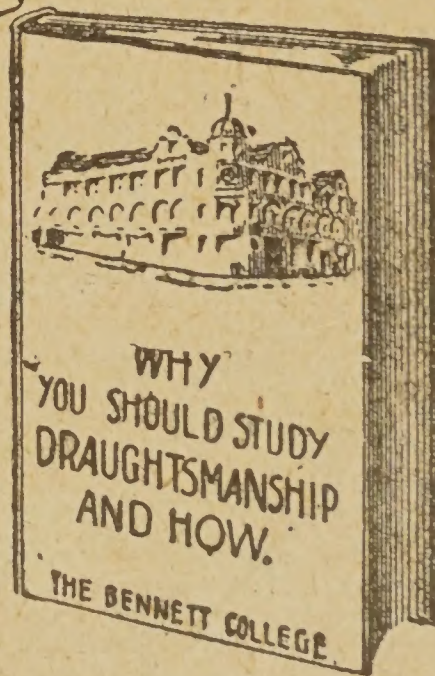
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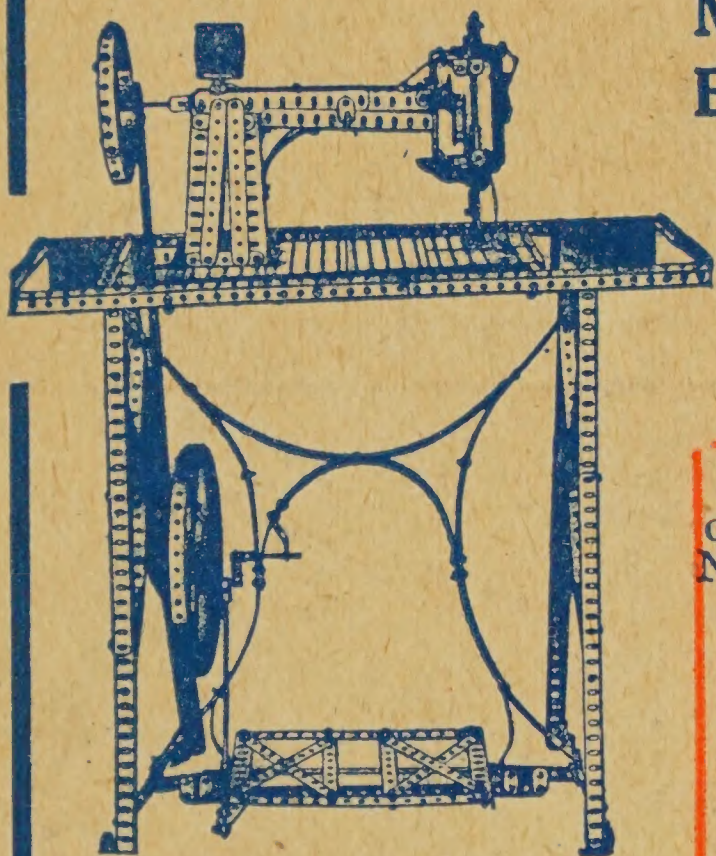
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